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Note from the Editors

December 2002

Welcome back for another issue of DEEP MAGIC.

For those of you who are joining us from d20zines.com, we want to give you a warm welcome as well. If you haven't already joined our subscription list (it's free), you can sign up to be notified by e-mail when our new issues are released.

We have some features this month that will impress you. First on the line-up is the in-depth article "Why Do People Read Fiction?" by David Farland (author of *The Runelords* saga). We also have some excellent story selections this month: *The Limwitch* by Rebekah Jensen, *Hunt* by Gary Wilbanks, and a sci-fi short called *Cinder-Relic* by Melva Gifford.

As a special treat for this time of year, we bring you the illustrated story *The Wishing Lantern* by Landmoor author Jeff Wheeler and his esteemed illustrator Randy Gallegos, who we featured in our October issue. To top things off, we bring you the prologue of the next novel we will serialize starting in January – *Tears of Minya.*

Also in this issue you will find an interview and artwork of Donato Giancola, whose work is known around the world. The interior spread is provided by Stan Wisniewski. And finally, editor Jeremy Whitted brings you the inside story on the origin of Deep Magic, a story fraught with controversy, intrigue, and…hold tight…OSX.

Our poll this month is the continuation of the "best science fiction movie" tournament we started last month. We had a record turnout for this vote and are pleased to bring the second wave of the tournament as these titans of the film industry face off in round 2.

Have a safe and fun holiday season and join us again in January 2003! And enjoy *Two Towers* – we plan to!

The Editors
DEEP MAGIC

Safe Places for Minds to Wander

Letters to the Editors

If you have any comments for us, send us an email or leave a note on the Message Boards. We look forward to hearing from you

Color My World
By Dave Hutcheson

Purple clouds against a yellow-orange sky;
Pink grass like a carpet below;
A green stream meandering nearby;
Soon we're expecting a violet snow.

How were we to know when two hundred years ago
We left Earth on our way to this place
That everything so strange would grow
And so much present a different face.

We started our voyage in 2025
To escape increasing famine and violence;
To keep hope and ourselves alive;
A brand new life to commence.

In 2176 we all landed here
And were awakened from our flight.
We've lived here now for many a year
And generally all's been all right.

Our children giggle about grass of green,
And a sky of blue they've never seen.
So many generations it took man just to find
That different colors we should not mind.

Editors note:
Since we don't really have a place for poetry in Deep Magic (yet), we thought this was a good spot for Mr. Hutcheson's poem. Thank you for sending it.

Hey guys,

I love the e-zine!! Keep up the great work. I have only had the pleasure of seeing the last two issues, but I have enjoyed them a great deal. I was wondering if you could address some things that I, and I'm sure other would-be writers would like to know. I have had a story in my head for years that I would like to put to paper some day. The problem is I don't know where to start. How do I flesh out the plot points, and create characters that are interesting and can be accepted and loved (or hated).

The only thing that I can think of doing is simply creating an outline of parts of the story, listing out the characters, and trying to come up with the relationships between the characters. Then if/when I get what I feel is workable I can try to write a story from that.

So I guess what I'm asking is can you do articles that describe the process of writing a story. Maybe it could be in the vein of articles related to learning to be a better DM [Dungeon Master]. Describe the process of writing a short story, and then maybe how it can be later expanded into a longer story. Finally, maybe you can take it a step further and add to it again to make it a full fledged novel with possible follow-up novels that tie in with it.

Well I know for one I would love this kind of article. I hope you can work something like this in.

Thanks, Terry

Reply: We love feedback like this, Terry. After discussing the challenge, we decided to tackle it head-on and will address this request in a special series of articles in the January 2003 issue. These articles will run from brainstorming ideas all the way to submitting them to a publisher or publication. Thanks for the feedback and the suggestion. We'll take you up on it.

One thing I am impressed with is that you are not only giving readers a 'safe' place to read. You are also allowing 'the cliche' to make its voice heard. My mind is always open.. and it enjoys the more 'cutting edge' fantasy, but my love for the past 32 years has been the 'traditional' fantasy angle... I love a fair elf... I respect a good wizard... I like my dragons to be MEAN dragons!!

Far too often, I am being told I am a sheep for having this view.. following commercial trends. When I was 16, I was a radical for reading fantasy... okay it is commercial to some extent now... but it is the 'traditional' fantasy that has sustained the genre, now it is spreading it wings.

So my suggestion is... keep that up... don't go all 'post-modern'... balance the two.

Reply: We can't tell you how much it means to hear comments like this. This is exactly why we started this e-zine. Thank you for letting us know you appreciate it, and keep coming back for more.

Writing Challenge

Another writing challenge come and gone. We received some creative submissions in November. Click the links below to view those chosen by our panel of editors. And be sure to read December's challenge. Send your challenge submissions to writingchallenge@amberlin.com.

An Evening at the Woodshop by Brendon Taylor
Grey-Rank by J.T. Slain
Black Rock by Anne M. Stickel

December 2002 Writing Challenge

How long will you give a new author to "hook" you with her story? If you are reading a thick hardback that you paid $27.99 for on the beaming recommendation of a trusted friend, you may give the book many pages, if not chapters, to grab your attention. What if it is a tattered paperback in a stack of eight that you checked out from the public library? Certainly not as many. If you are reading a short story on the internet, the author better write something that stirs your interest on the first page. The writing challenge this month is to craft the first page or two of a story in a way that will draw the reader's interest and make them want to keep turning the pages. It can be the beginning of a short story, full novel, or epic series. Write something that will make a reader want more. We're not suggesting that you need to create a whole, drawn-out mystery in three paragraphs. Just that you pull us into a scene that offers enough of a "hook" to go on. How you do that is up to you. We look forward to reading your new beginnings.

November 2002 Writing Challenge: The devil is in the details, as the saying goes, but it is also the little touches that bring a fantasy world or science fiction universe to life. The writing challenge this month is to create a scene where you pay attention to the little details. It can be a busy marketplace or spaceport, a wooded forest, or even an entryway. Use specific details to describe the scene without relying on writing crutches like: "stacks of fresh produce lined the streets" (What kind of produce? Pumpkins, green bananas?) or "huge towering trees blocked the view further ahead" (What kind of trees? What other specific vegatation exists in that ecosystem) or "big ugly aliens loitered in the intergalactic restroom." (Well, maybe specific details are not desirable in this case, but more description is.) And the trick, of course, will be adding enough specific details to make it interesting and not so much that it becomes a Tolkienesque epic for your character to get from one side of the room to the other. Pay attention to the point of view you decide to use. A ranger or omniscient narrator might know the plant as poison oak, but an inept city-boy would only be able to describe it. Use the internet for ideas of plants, flowers, trees, or upholstry. And, as always, keep the submission less than 1000 words. Dazzle us with your subtlety.

An Evening at the Woodshop

By Brendon Taylor

All was quiet in the well-used woodshop on Elrod Avenue, except the occasional tapping of a leather-faced mallet on wood. Taig Millen crouched over an overturned table, working six curved legs like puzzle pieces into position.

Taig was the oldest son in the Millen family, a man at nineteen years, but just barely. He would take over the family business in a few years and then think about finding a wife and beginning a family of his own. That his future was settled, and that it would not take him more than a block from where he had spent his entire life, satisfied Taig. His ambitions were modest, and his sense of duty and love of family were paramount. He would carry on the family tradition that had earned his uncle and father the position of Carpentry Guild Master and their families a comfortable living in the Northwest Quadrant of Saivers, the largest city in the Freelands.

Each tap of the mallet stirred sawdust into fine plumes that swayed and dissipated along a faint draft. After each tap, he held the lantern over the center of the table where all six legs met, and scrutinized the center hole. Sharp, slate blue eyes took in every detail, checked angles, and positions as sweat dripped from his blond hair and from the tip of his nose to the table bottom below. Out of habit, he chewed on his lower lip while concentrating on his work. This job was so tedious that his mouth would be sore for days.

After measuring the gaps between the outer curves of the legs, Taig set the center dowel into place with a few coercive raps of the mallet, and then drove the pins in place to secure the center dowel. As he worked, he heard a familiar lecture from his father in his mind, "a hammer will move the wood more quickly than a mallet, but it will leave scars." Thinking of his father brought a lump to his throat. Raymond was supposed to have returned from a lumber trip to the White Oak Forest nearly a week earlier.

After inserting the leg braces and spacers, Taig flipped the table over, and promptly raised his eyebrows. The six separate legs met the floor evenly with perfect balance on the first try. He welcomed his good fortune.

Through the west window, Taig saw the shadows from large squareleaf trees and the garden fence stretching across the yard. That brought his thoughts to the worn leather bag hanging from a peg near the door. While working on the table, he lost track of time. It was Spring Solanex evening and the quarterly council reporting tribunal would call to order within the hour. More importantly, Uncle Dell had not come for the reports.

The Grey-Rank

By JT Slane

It was shortly after stopping to eat on a boulder outcropping that Seyth Bajan noticed the shadows of the vultures circling above him. He paused in the midst of sinking his teeth into a slice of spotted pear and quickly inspected the glen. Chewing slowly, he leaned forward and brought himself to his feet, crouched and ready to spring away from the rock. Sniffing the air only brought in scents he expected from the hinterlands of Stonehollow – dwarf sandwort, monkeyflower, tarweed, whitneya, clover, and the rich earthy smell from the endless sentinel-like sequoias. Nature bloomed in a thousand varieties and fragrances in the hinterlands, and Seyth Bajan knew them all.

Looking up, he brushed the juice from his lips and craned his neck. It was nearly noon and the sun seared the blue wash of sky. About a dozen speckled condors loped in wide circles, sinking lower and lower. It was peculiar that he could not find the scent of anything they might be circling for. Too many birds for a single rabbit or fox. He rubbed his face, feeling the scratchiness of his beard and teasing loose the crumbs of potato-bread he'd finished earlier. He finished off the pear quickly and watched the condors swoop down, sinking lower and lower until they landed in a pocket of dense sedge and buckwheat by a boulder nearly a mile away. Even at the distance, he could hear the hoarse noise of the scavengers and then realized suddenly it was not a boulder at all but a dead grey-rank.

Seyth stared at the mass and then tossed the pear core. He scooped up the three-bracted onions he'd found earlier and deposited them in his pack with the sugar sticks before slinging it around his shoulders. After grabbing his ash bow, he started down the stunted hillside towards the remains.

BLACK ROCK

By Anne M. Stickel

Our already hot, dusty group sets out for Black Rock, a little breathless and giddy from starting too quickly. We sneak away without provisions, so as not to alert our parents. They have cautioned us not to go to the Place of Magic. But, on a secret dare, my two younger brothers, my small sister, three of our male cousins, and I have chosen to join my twin brother, and ignore our parents.

The trail rises above the trees for a last view of the azure lake and the black, red and white-painted tents of our summer encampment. Finally, scraggly pines hide the lake's precious waters and the camp, where the other children play and elders nap in the shade. Taunting blue jays and sassy squirrels on overhead tree limbs oversee the scramble-down, gritty, rust-red dirt path that trips up our scuffling feet with twigs and stones. The dry breeze sighs with, but does not cool us. It has wandered up from the Great Desert to drink new life from the twin bowls of our lake and her sister, high places blessed by snow and rain. The lakes remind me of my brother and I, who were born the same day.

Ahead, thin arid air shimmers with heat rising from a sea of black glass. My brother, bolder than the rest and the instigator of our disobedience, leads through territory meant for bear, buzzard, cougar, snake, and more secretive animals. Who will be first to turn tail, full tilt, back to camp, fleeing the bleak desolation and its denizens, I wonder? Since no one wants to walk last, we take turns. Even though we are well out of the hearing of adults, laughter and words elude parched lips. We should have at least brought water. It does not seem right to signal our presence. Some Thing might hear.

On all sides, evidence of an ancient cataclysm looms ever higher. Eyes and ears focus warily on the path before and behind. Thirsty shuffling silence reigns in the endless windings through razor-sharp alleys of rock, its many surfaces intensifying the inferno of the noon sun. Jagged boulders absorb nature's sounds, seeming to transmute them into more merciless heat. Footing becomes tricky on the narrow path. Blisters throb on moccasined feet. Hearts pound harder. Sweat evaporates. Backs shiver under sticky leather tunics. Blown noses bleed.

Thoughts dwell on our possible fate. We look at one another and know we are all thinking of the legendary Lost, who have run the magic gauntlet of Black Rock, ending hungry, thirsty, sunburned, brown bodies gashed bloody, dying among hungry predators and angry spirits clothed in scalps trailing long black hair. It is said they eat the liver first and the eyes last so as to prolong the torture of transgressors. We were mad to take the dare. Dark magic rules from a cruel bright heart that kills with cold by night and heat by day. I know we must all feel in our bones the rightness of our parents' caution. Thus routed from the brink of terror's abyss, our youthful feet beat a hasty retreat, my brother in the lead. Running behind all the others, I sense shadows chasing me. By some miracle they do not catch up.

Finally, we adventurers stumble into camp together, to stand panting, white-faced, dry-mouthed, and, by unspoken agreement, silent. To tell is to risk the ire of some Thing betrayed. Although I feel like we've been gone for an entire day, little time has passed in camp. Elders are just rising from their rest, unaware that Magic Blood could spew forth from the trembling earth, erasing and remaking, as we have learned in the stories of our grandfathers. Better to leave Black Rock to the fish eagles flying free, circling and calling in their sacred space, and to let them carry memories of us away on the wind.

Poll: The Best SciFi Movie of All Time Round Two

Round One of our SciFi poll is over, and it was our most successful poll yet! We've enjoyed putting it together, and for the most part, response has been positive. As we expected, some people were miffed that we left a few movies out. (In our defense, we hadn't heard of most of them.) So allow us to explain how Round Two will work.

Round Two will feature ten brackets of four movies each. The majority of these forty movies were the winners of their brackets in Round One. In addition, we have added a few movies that were left out (these include Dark Star, Solyaris, and a few others). However, we were left with a couple extra slots to fill. We decided to look at the first round and find a couple that were barely voted out. As a result, two movies got a second chance (Minority Report and Pitch Black).

In addition, we thought we'd try to organize this round a little better. The first time around, it was hard to put the movies in any kind of order. This round, however, we have done our best to create themes among the movies. For example, we have four movies under the heading Space Opera, four under Aliens Visiting Earth, and 2 brackets of four movies under a Space Exploration category. It's not a perfect science. There were some movies that didn't really fit their themes, but for the most part, we're pleased with the groupings. We're sure some of you will let us know if you disagree.

So to make is simple, just select your favorite movie from each of the ten brackets. The winners, of course, will move on to the third round.

So without further ado, we present Round Two: The Best SciFi Movie of All Time. Voting for Round Two ends December 20th.

Bonus Poll:

One of the comments we often receive is about the high quality of our cover art. Looking back at this first year, we have had some truly amazing pieces of art on our covers. Since this is the last issue of the year, we thought we'd get your opinion on which cover you think is the best.

Go to our bonus poll page and vote for your favorite. You can also get a quick look at all the covers from that page.

Vote.

Go to the SciFi Tournament Poll

Our poll sponsored by csPoller. They provided us a great poll script, so please go to their site and check out their great scripts. They offer a wide selection of quality cgi-scripts, and their support is fantastic.

The Limwitch
By Rebekah Jensen

Mellisa threw down her ash pencil in disgust. "I'll never make a good witch," she declared angrily to the empty room, "I never could rhyme!" She kicked the leg of her desk and glared at the papyrus spellsheet in front of her. Despite her wishes, the awkward sentences remained.

"There once was a man from Algonkar..." she mumbled. Word upon word, a small green mist grew in the center of a spellcircle on the floor in front of her. "Whose shoes were known to leak water..." The mist suddenly developed pink spots and began to writhe violently.

"Oh, don't do that!" she pleaded to the green entity, "I know it doesn't quite rhyme, but..." she trailed off as the mist disappeared in a final fit of agony.

She was only trying to summon a familiar; every second year magic student had one. Her instructor had made her stay after class to try spellcasting again for the millionth time. Her classmates had filed out past her, smirking, each followed by their personal bundle of fur or fangs or both.

She was only trying to summon a familiar; every second year magic student had one. Her instructor had made her stay after class to try spellcasting again for the millionth time.

She sighed and tried afresh. "There was a boy who loved berries..." this time the mist was a bluish shade of red. "Uh...who also liked small… little..." the mist began to fade, "Cherries!" The mist solidified suddenly. Mellisa was so surprised she almost forgot to continue.

"Oh! But he once ate an orange," The mist grew a couple of feet and one eye; Mellisa looked at it in hope. "And it gave him a..." The eye blinked at her expectantly.

"It gave him a... uh... cornge, um bornge, surunge... Oh, no, don't, please, oh, oh ... crud." The cute blue mist full of promise vanished abruptly.

Mellisa sighed tragically. Her life was ruined. She would be the laughing stock of the second grade and her instructor would beat her... She sagged against her chair dramatically. Then the thought of her teacher reminded her of something he had told her earlier that day in class.

"Don't make it so complicated, Mellissandra," he had said in exasperation, "Write about something you know!"

She pulled out a new spellsheet and began again slowly. "There once was a witch sans familiar..." A pale yellow mist grew feebly, "But her rhyming was very peculiar." The mist swayed perilously but somehow survived.

"She...um...need a verse!" The mist turned into fur and two legs and two arms appeared. She was on a roll, she could feel it, "Um... but ...uh..." two more arms appeared, "she couldn't rehearse!" The fuzz developed eyes and a mouth.

Suddenly she was stuck. "Um! Er!" she began frantically. The fur acquired a sickly greenish tinge. "And she...and she..." The creature was beginning to fade around the edges.

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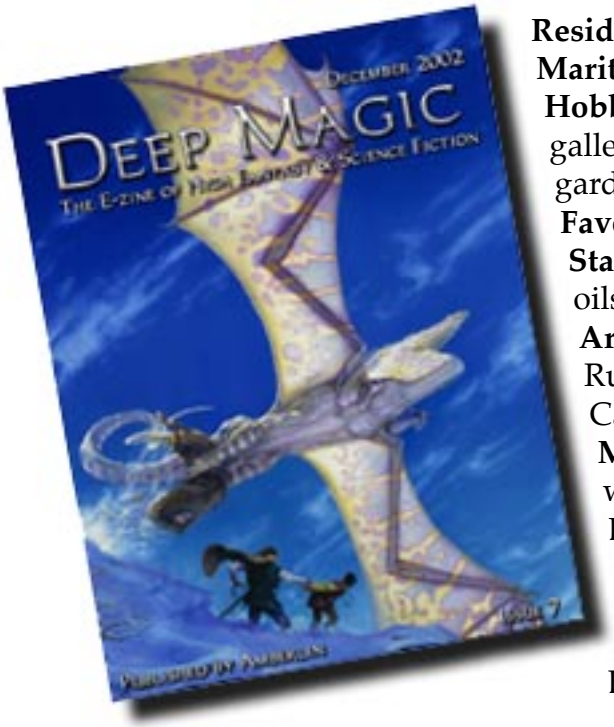
Feature Artist
Donato Giancola



Residence: Brooklyn, New York City
Marital Status: Married with one daughter
Hobbies: Most everything related to art: attending museums, galleries, life sketch classes, etc... soccer, hiking, and avant garde plays and performances.
Favorite book: Crime and Punishment by Fyodor Dostoevsky
Started Painting In: 1987, the first year I purchased a set of oils.
Artists Most Inspired By: Hans Memling, Velazquez, Rubens, Modrian, Vincent Desiderio, Titian, Caravaggio, I don't have just one!
Mediums You Work In: Oil paint, graphite, and a small bit with acrylics.
Education: Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York. College of Visual and Performing Arts, BFA Painting, Summa Cum Laude, May 1992. University of Vermont, Burlington, Vermont. College of Engineering and Business Administration, electrical engineering, 1985-88.

Experience: Freelance Illustration & Portraiture, Clients include Free Masons of Philadelphia, Milton-Bradley, Hasbro, The SciFi Channel, All-American Television, Danbury Mint, Franklin Mint, DC Comics, Playboy, Avon Books, Ballantine, Bantam, Berkley, Penguin, Random House, Scholastic, Sega, Simon & Schuster, Tor, Warner, Iron Crown Enterprises, Five Rings Publishing, and Wizards of the Coast. *1993 to present.* Instructor, School of Visual Arts, New York, New York. *1995 to 2000.* Instructor, Fashion Institute of Technology, New York, New York, 1999. Guest Lecturer, Syracuse University MFA Program for Illustration, Syracuse University Visiting Artist Symposium, Pratt Institute, Fashion Institute of Technology, Pennsylvania School of Art and Design, School of Visual Arts. *1994 to present.* Studio Assistant to Vincent Desiderio, Long Island City, New York. *1993 to 1997.* Co-Chair, Student Scholarship Committee, Society of Illustrators, 1997. Curator, New Members Exhibition, Society of Illustrators, 1995.
Memberships, Awards & Exhibitions: Too many to list here. See website for a complete list.
Where Your Work Has Been Published or Displayed: Almost anywhere books are sold in the English Language, as well as covers in Spain, Italy, Germany, The Netherlands, and Russia.
Where Someone Can Contact You Professionally: donato@donatoart.com
Buy Your Art: http://www.donatoart.com/prinframeset.html
Website URL: http://www.donatoart.com

Q: How did you come to be an artist?
A: Although there are milestones in my professional arts career, I can't really say exactly when I "began" drawing and painting in a serious manner. My childhood is peppered with memories of making models, toys, drawing in the afternoons, reading comics, painting lead figurines, creating

maps for role-playing, producing art projects for school... the list continued and constantly elevated in the level of difficulty in image-making that I embraced. My formal training came late. I began my college career at UVM majoring in electrical engineering, but it wasn't until my second year at the University of Vermont that I withdrew from this career path and enrolled in an art course. That same year I picked up my first set of oil paints and have spent the years since then attempting to properly work with them.

I realized to take painting seriously I needed to pursue education at a more challenging college with more competitive peers. I enrolled at Syracuse University in the fall of 1989 and majored in fine art painting. All told, my "college career" lasted six years, but it paid off: I'm doing what I love to do.

After graduating from college in 1992, I moved to New York City to be closer to the art scene. I sought work as a book cover illustrator, concentrating in the science fiction and fantasy field. It was a big leap. It was several months before I got any commissions, and NYC is not a cheap place to live. I resisted the temptation to get a "regular" job and barely supported myself by working part time at the Society of Illustrators and by borrowing money from my parents (who suspected I was crazy). I spent all my time creating samples under the guidance of my agent, visiting museums, examining other illustrators' work, and attending art openings. I shared a small apartment with two other aspiring artists, and every day I painted about 8-10 hours. The hard work finally paid off with commissions to produce covers for the classic science fiction books The Time Machine by H.G. Wells, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court by Mark Twain, and Journey to the Center of the Earth by Jules Verne. Since then, I have found very steady work as a free-lance book cover illustrator and am now expanding into other market places as I push my art further

Q: How would you describe your work?
A: My work is derived from everyday experiences that are then melded with the needs of

commercial illustration. With a twist of abstraction for the foundation I then use classical approaches to realism to construct my illusions of other worlds/places.

Q: What inspired this piece? (Tell us its story)
A: "DragonFlight" came about from the need to illustrate a novel of fantasy for a book publisher, but also satisfying my desire to create a compelling work of art. The situation depicted in the painting is not quite as it appeared in the book. I took some artistic liberties, drawing inspiration from a Chinese film I had seen a few weeks before which included a low angle view of a woman walking along a ridge as the setting sun illuminated her from behind. I wanted to produce an image which was highly graphic, thus the translucent wings capturing the sun, but was also filled with action. The action came about from my desire to show the dragon as a hunting animal. The snatching of the horse is an action similar to the roles played out by the other two characters, in which one of them is being caught by the other. There is an implied sense of intelligence and animal qualities that crosses back and forth between both pairs of predator and prey.

Q: What has been your greatest success in your artistic career?
A: There are a few great successes, but none so far as equaled the chance to illustrate the covers of two of my favorite and most inspirational books, The Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit, for the Science Fiction Book Club.

Q: What trends are you seeing in the Sci-Fi/ Fantasy genre?
A: The genre is always in a state of flux, a condition that I love as new ideas and artists find their place while others drop out and disappear. Currently the proliferation of digital illustration and its speeding up of production times has put a bit of pressure on traditional, painted illustrators. I find the need to be faster with my turn around.

But at the same time, my work as become more highly valued as original art is produced less. Digital hardware still does not substitute for a powerful idea and strong composition, these things are fueled by a creative mind whether working traditionally or not. Talented artists, who know how to paint, now have a growing market for original works to be sold at even higher prices than before. I can only thank my fellow digital illustrators for helping to make me more highly sought after!

WHY DO PEOPLE READ FICTION? AND HOW CAN YOU USE THAT KNOWLEDGE?

BY DAVID FARLAND

Quite frankly, the answers to these questions depend on who you ask. They aren't necessarily the same for all readers.

For example, I don't read horror. I've seen enough real horrors in life that the fictions I have read seldom can even phase me. Those that do touch me often strike too deeply. I found Dean Koontz's novel *Intensity* to be far too chilling. I had friends murdered by a serial killer when I was a child (they were hacked into pieces and thrown from a speeding car). The killer was a man whose property bordered on my father's farm. And so I don't like reading about serial killers.

So don't ask me why so many people read horror. Nor do I consider myself to be an expert on romance. But I will talk about some attractions that are common to almost all fiction, and I'll discuss how to use the knowledge.

I don't read horror. I've seen enough real horrors in life that the fictions I have read seldom can even phase me.

Before I do that, I'd like you to perform an exercise.

Exercise: You probably have a good idea about what you want to write—horror, mainstream, fantasy, historical, romance, westerns, religious fiction, and whatnot. Sit down for ten minutes and on the left hand side of your paper, list the ten things that you feel you most like in the fiction you read. On the right-hand side of your paper, list the biggest potential danger that you see in trying to create that effect.

Doing this exercise will help you understand who your potential audience is, and some of the challenges that you may face in reaching that audience.

For example, let's say that you like fantasy. On the left-hand side of the paper, you might write:

1) I like to escape to strange new worlds.

On the right-hand side of your paper you might write:

I'm afraid that the worlds I create might not be strange enough. Or maybe they'll be so strange that it will be hard to communicate them to my audience.

Write your own answers now. If you know other writers, compare your answers with theirs.

Why Do People Really Read?

Why do people read for entertainment instead of doing something else? Why not go skiing,

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HUNT
By G. Allen Wilbanks

A small rundown shack stood forlornly at the top of the hill, an ugly splotch of brown on a backdrop of green. Sonja paused on a gravel path leading up to the wooden blight on an otherwise perfect landscape, and only at Rith's urging did she move toward it. Her left hand caressed the pommel of the sword hanging at her hip, a nervous habit she had acquired recently. The feel of the cool metal under her palm soothed her. It was solid and reliable in a world where so few things were.

Her uncle strode beside her, graceful and sure, taking one step for every two of hers. His ice-gray eyes glittered with purpose as they peered ahead from under a thatch of unruly black hair. Rithagarianaff did not carry a sword. For this particular journey he had decided to travel light, carrying only what he needed to hunt for food along the way. He had his knife on his belt, and a bow and quiver slung across his back. Even so, he was a formidable presence. Years of training and countless battles had taught him how to recognize and deal with any threat, armed or not. Sonja felt safe with her uncle nearby, but was still grateful for the heavy blade at her side.

Rith chose this moment to join the conversation. "Demarcus, I want you to tell her how to slay a dragon."

As she climbed the hill, struggling to keep pace with her uncle without actually breaking into a run, Sonja noticed the first signs of life about the ruined house: a flickering light in the window, a thin stream of gray smoke rising from the chimney, a small but obviously well-tended garden. She wondered what could be inside the deteriorating shack that was so important for her training. But she wondered only briefly. She knew her uncle wished her to be here for some purpose and she would learn the reason soon enough. The pair covered ground rapidly, her uncle moving easily, almost casually, Sonja traveling less so, until at last they stood on the sagging, termite eaten porch, listening to the sounds of someone or something moving around inside.

"Now what?" she asked.

He did not look at her. Her uncle stood a few feet to her left, gazing calmly down the path they had just ascended. "What do you usually do when you stand on someone's doorstep?" he answered.

Sonja reached out and knocked tentatively. The door rattled on its hinges despite the lack of force behind her blows, and for a moment she thought it might break loose and fall down. It held however, and after a short wait she heard a soft click from inside. The door swung open. The open doorway revealed a hunched little man dressed completely in a drab, sack-like, cloth robe. He looked like a refugee from some long ago war, stooped and beaten; ready to fall down and cast his soul to the wind at any time should his broken body finally decide it could endure no more. He held the door with his right hand, and Sonja noticed that where his left arm should have been there was only an empty sleeve. What remained of the missing limb terminated somewhere just above the elbow. The man's face, neck, and other exposed body parts were covered with a series of thick, ridged scars that spoke of a terrible fire he had survived at one time in his life. Sonja could see no hair on his body; no

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Interview: David Farland

Q: How has the internet affected your relationship with readers and/or publishers?

A: The internet helps with my publishers in that I can get notes and information to them quickly, but with my fans, the internet IS my relationship. A writer's fans are typically so spread out that it's difficult to get more than a dozen or two in a room together, even at a major science fiction convention. But the internet gives me access to people around the world, and I get several letters each day. Just this week I've heard from fans in Western Australia, Wales, Bulgaria, England, Denmark, Canada, and throughout the United States. (Most of the letters are from folks who desperately want to know when book four, "The Lair of Bones," will be released. The answer is: I don't know yet. It's in to my publisher, and the release date will depend on what best fits their schedule.) So its very easy now to get feedback from fans, to get a sense of community that I didn't have as a new author. And the internet really is almost my soul source of information. The only fan letters I get through the mail tend to be from children, the kind of thing that they write in school because their third-grade teacher makes them. I don't mind that. In fact, it's wonderful to discover that you're some kid's favorite author. I especially like it when the kids send pictures illustrating a scene from the book. But with the internet, I've been able to go beyond just getting fan mail and have actually made a few friends, like Matt Harrill who lives in Chipping Sodbury, England; or a young woman named Terra who lives in Texas.

Q: Tell us the story of how your first book was published.

A: Actually, I started writing fiction in college and entering contests. I won some prizes, and soon found that I was making more money from that than I would if I had taken a job at, say, McDonalds. So when I got to a point where I really was thinking about taking a job, I invested my time in writing instead. I wrote a science fiction story called "On My Way to Paradise," which won the grand prize in the Writer's of the Future Contest, which then led to a three-novel contract with Bantam Books. I wrote the book version of "On My Way to Paradise" under the name of Dave Wolverton, and it became a best-seller.

Unfortunately, though I like science fiction fine, my first love has always been fantasy. So after I had written a few scienc fiction novels, I found myself feeling desperate to get back to fantasy. Eventually, though I still had some science fiction novels on the table, I just had to throw myself into a fantasy. So "The Runelords" became my first fantasy novel, and, currently, fantasy is all that I'm writing.

Go to David Farland's article, "Why Do People Read Fiction?"

Cinder–Relic
By Melva Gifford

"Pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake, baker's man,
Bake me a cake as fast as you can.
Roll it, and prick it, and mark it with—"

Remma-17 paused and stared at the mother sitting on the chair. In her arms a plump baby boy giggled as his mother played with him. Before her, stapled upon the walls of the large kindergarten, were printouts of children's pictures of homes and families. It was parent's day at the school, and the mother was one of three adults who had come to visit the Kindergarten.

One of the school's greatest attributes was its adherence to old traditions. Teaching the latest, yes—but some of the old technology was maintained to provide an atmosphere of nostalgia more for the parents than the children. Perhaps that was why Remma-17, an older model machine, still performed her duties at the school.

Pat-a-cake—something about the word. Remma-17 blinked her metallic eyelids. Something from her past…

She had duties to perform. Her programming was as a teacher's aide to Mrs. Lindsey, an instructor at the most prestigious school located in the heart of Washington D.C.

Two seconds behind schedule.

After delivering two armfuls of pillows would come her and the children's favorite time of the day: story time.

"Thank you for coming and for showing an interest in another step toward android freedom. It is a privilege to stand in a place of such significance to human history."

Another memory intruded upon her visual receptors. Years ago, she had been walking through the door of a clothing store, to return an item for her master.

"Out of the way, toaster." A teenager boy hollered as he came up from behind her. The motor of the skateboard he was riding whined in complaint as the lad abruptly stomped on the back paddle to flip the machine up under his arms.

He shoved his way past Remma to enter through the door before her. He glanced briefly back at her and smirked at her upraised hands, an android equivalent of astonishment.

Remma blinked.

Her past?

Another image.

Remma stood in line behind two humans at the grocery store. A heavy-set woman panted as she hurried up to stand behind her.

"Humans go first," the woman said.

Remma smiled. "My master is also in a rush, My Lady." She pointed a chrome finger toward the front

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A Cure for Insomnia
By Jeremy Whitted

Have you ever wondered what it takes to create and produce an e-zine, such as Deep Magic? No? Well, too bad. You're about to find out. I'd like to say it was a quick, easy process, but then I wouldn't be able to explain the hair loss, sleep deprivation, and all the other joys of running a quality publication. This project has been in the making for nearly ten years. So, in the interest of, well, self-glorification, here is our story. And a little how-to thrown in for the fun of it.

I'd like to say it was a quick, easy process, but then I wouldn't be able to explain the hair loss, sleep deprivation, and all the other joys of running a quality publication.

Depending on who you talk to, the origin of Deep Magic varies. It is, without dispute, the brainchild of Jeff Wheeler, Brendon Taylor, and yours truly, Jeremy Whitted. The three of us had plans of going into the publishing industry almost ten years ago. This is where Brendon will claim he had the first inspiration for Deep Magic. I, of course, disagree, but he apparently made the suggestion of opening our own publishing business. While true, it's a little vague, if you ask me, so I'll give you the true origin of this e-zine.

(Internal Editorial Comment by Brendon: In 1993, Jeff, Jeremy and I were living in San Jose, California when we discussed getting into the publishing business. Since none of us had the capital to buy the equipment to open a publishing house, we bantered ideas off each other. My idea at the time was for a print magazine -- this was prior to the proliferation of the internet -- called "Del Rey Presents: Fantasy '94." Jeff will back me up on this. As you might have guessed, my hope was to land the biggest player in the market as our sponsor. Without any experience and without ever really following through with the idea, this business plan was doomed to failure. Years later, after Jeremy had gained significant experience with online editing, he pitched the idea of a fantasy/sci fi e-zine to Jeff and me, as he will explain below.)

After off-and-on discussion and planning over the course of the 90's, the three of us decided, in 1999, to publishing a children's story that Jeff had written called The Wishing Lantern. We set up our company, Amberlin Books, hired Randy Gallegos to illustrate the book, created the amberlin.com website, and published it in hardback. We were proud of our work. In fact, we published an electronic version of it in this month's issue. (Please note that not all of the original illustrations were included.) So we took our run of books and started selling them. Of course, it did not quite turn out the way we thought, but we had a great product and had learned some great lessons.

It was a short time after publishing The Wishing Lantern that I approached Jeff and Brendon about doing an online magazine of fantasy stories. My dream has always been to publish a literary magazine in print, but I figured online would be a good start. So with grand plans in hand, I went to my partners and pitched the idea. I was turned down. I thought I might try it on my own, but that got nowhere. I just didn't have the energy to be able to run something of this size by myself.

A year later, we all met to discuss the future of Amberlin. And wouldn't you know it? They both wanted to do an e-zine. Deep Magic was born (after a considerable amount of debate on the name). By now, we were

in mid-2001. It took a year to get our first issue out, but now we're going strong. And in case you're wondering, the name Deep Magic is, in fact, a nod to C.S. Lewis. If that means nothing to you, then you obviously weren't wondering about the name.

So, though I may be disputed by my fellow partners, that is how Deep Magic was born. And the three of us made the beginnings of a great team. Jeff is the marketer; the business man. He has the MBA, the drive, and the shameless audacity to go out and get us what we need. Brendon is the lawyer. Really. He currently practices law in Eastern Idaho. Not only do his lawyer skills come in handy, but, like Jeff, he is a writer and has a great business mind.

I, on the other hand, am the grunt. And I love every minute of it. I created the Amberlin and Deep Magic websites (with input from Jeff and Brendon, of course), I do all the layout and graphics work for the e-zine (well, not all: Reuben Fox created the Amberlin logo and many of the graphics), and I'm the final line of defense for copyediting. So when you see a typo, it is, when all is said and done, my fault. We compliment each other's abilities nicely, and it has made for a great working environment. We've also all been friends for years. Jeff and I have know each other since we were seven years old.

Not only do the three of us work well together, but before the first issue was out, we already had the beginnings of a great volunteer staff. Contributing editor Melissa Thomas has provided invaluable insights and talent, and the participation and hard work of our team of associate editors, which include Peter Dahl, JW Wrenn, Rochelle Buck, and Joel Brown, allow us to keep going without charging for subscriptions.

So how do we actually get an issue out? Well, there are a few components that have to fall into place. First, and most important, we must have submissions. This is where I want to digress for a minute. We get submissions on a regular basis, but not as many as we'd like. And I would guess that one of the main reasons for not getting more is that we don't pay our authors. Let me tell you why. We plan on being around for a while. One reason why we believe we will be is that we have a very definite business model. We could never hope to stay in business if we paid out to our authors without making any money. That could last for a while, but eventually the funds would dry up and we would be done. So, for now, we can't pay our authors. Once money starts coming in, we will. But we have decided against charging a subscription for the e-zine, so it will take us a little while. However, with exciting things coming down the pipe, like publishing Landmoor in paperback, we hope to have a cash flow in 2003.

So, back to my original train of thought. When we receive a submission, it is posted to our panel of editors, which are mentioned above. Some submissions are accepted unconditionally, some are accepted if the author is willing to work on a few things, and others are rejected. Once accepted, a story (or article) goes through the copyediting procedure, which involves at least two thorough sets of eyes, the last of which is mine.

Along with stories, we also publish artwork. That part is much easier, since artwork can't be edited. Some pieces are submitted to us while others we actively recruit. If any of you have an inside connection with Larry Elmore, let us know. Once a piece is selected, either for cover or internal, it is sent to me for publishing.

Once I have everything, I can start laying it out. Up through Issue 5, I did all the layout in QuarkXPress (on my PowerMac G4/800 - I love my Mac!) and printed to PDF using Adobe Acrobat Distiller. However, I have now switched to Adobe InDesign for the e-zine layout. I really like Quark, but they haven't upgraded their program to the new Mac OSX, and Adobe has, so I switched. InDesign is a great program, though, and it has made it much easier to publish Deep Magic.

Once I have the first version of the issue ready, I send it to Jeff,Brendon, and Melissa (a very devoted and talented contributing editor) for a good once-over. They all send me corrections and I create the final pdf. Then, of course, I have to update and create new pages for the website. Not to mention set up the new poll and all that other fun stuff. (While I'm doing that, Jeff and Brendon are off working on the stories and articles for the next issue.) When it's all ready, the issue goes live and we send out an email to the subscription list announcing its availability. The rest, as they say, is history.

If you're still reading this article, then congratulations. I think I nodded off a couple times while writing it. But this should give you a small idea of what we go through every month. And we do all this not for the money (because there is none), but for the love of fantasy and science fiction. Hopefully that's why you are here too.

We hope you enjoy Deep Magic. If you have thus far, then we are confident you will continue to enjoy what we have coming in the future. I already mentioned that we're going to publish Landmoor in paperback. We also have plans to re-publish The Wishing Lantern in a large-format paperback. Add to that a possible sequel to Landmoor, anthologies of some short stories we've published, and other exciting possibilities, and the future looks bright. Or at the very least, fun. (A note to appease the lawyer in Brendon: the preceding paragraph is not intended as a guarantee for any of the aforementioned future projects. Things can change without notice.)

I think that's all I have to say. And I'm sure it's more than enough. Please stop by our message boards and let us know what you think of the e-zine. We have appreciated the comments we have already been given. They encourage us to keep this e-zine going.

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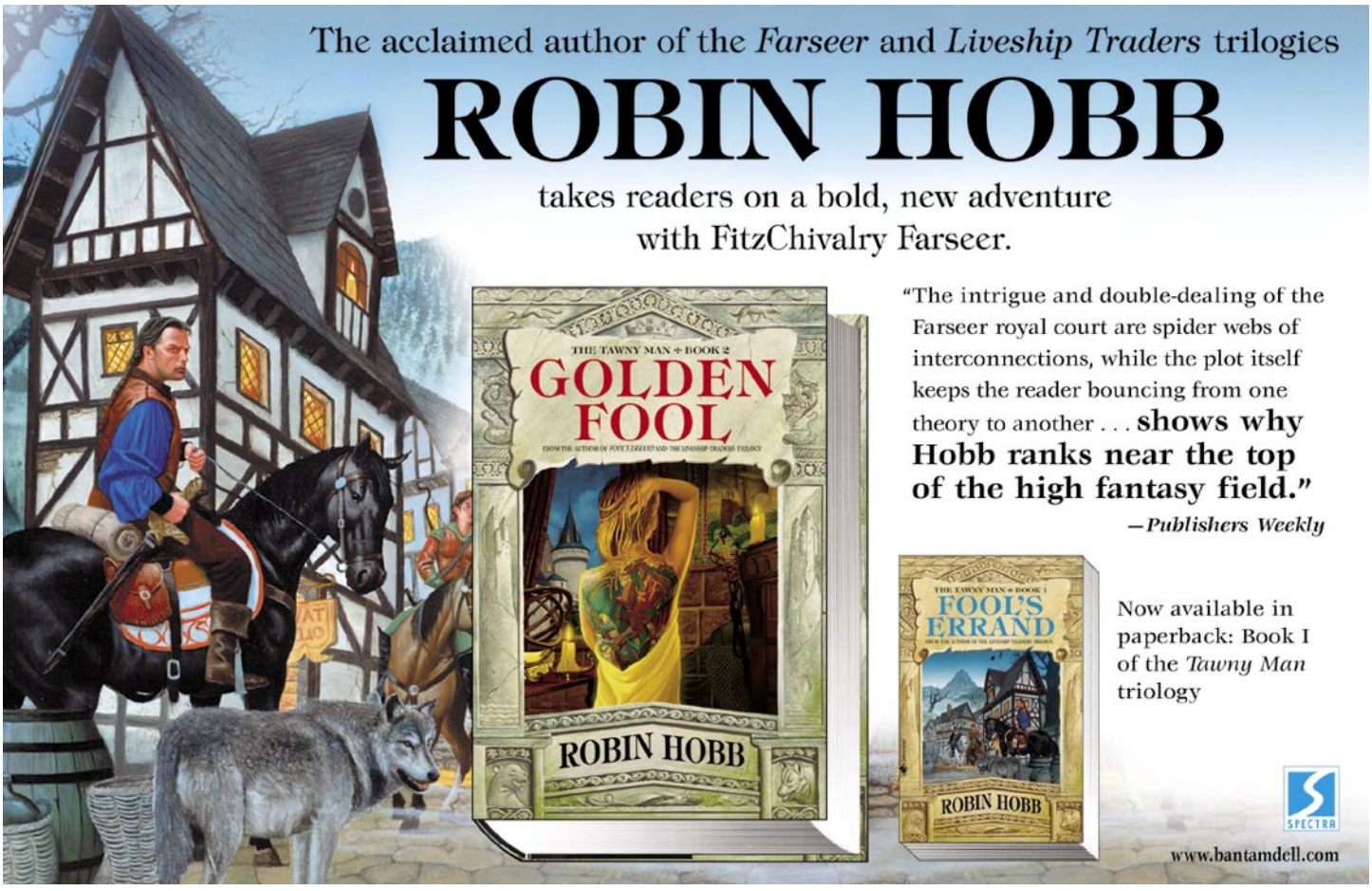
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TEARS OF MINYA

By Jeff Wheeler

PROLOGUE

Port of Abyri, Atabyrion

She was living in a nightmare. Jannis hugged herself in the darkness to try and stop the trembling. Fear twisted around inside her like a garden snake, all cold and wet in her stomach. The cellar was cold and filthy, making her miserable as well as dirty. It stank of musty, rotting turnips. Her knees were scraped and rough with scabs. In the stillness, she heard her brother breathing in little sobs. She rubbed her eyes, then opened them again, squinting at the faint crack of lamplight slipping in through the floor of the cellar door. That was the only light in the dark place.

"Do you…do you hear him?" Sten whimpered.

"No." Jannis folded her arms again and clamped them against her sides. The cold stone floor cut at her legs every time she shifted positions. "Come here, Sten."

The little boy moved in the dark and they hugged each other, both for comfort and for warmth. It had been two days. Two days since the bad man had taken them. Two days in the dark root cellar beneath the streets.

"I want Mama."

"I know, Sten," Jannis said, squeezing and soothing him. She wanted to cry, but she didn't think she had any tears left. "I know. I miss her too."

It had been two days. Two days since the bad man had taken them. Two days in the dark root cellar beneath the streets.

"Where is he taking us?"

"I'm not sure," she replied, afraid. "I thought he said the city of Minya. But that's a long way from here. It's the biggest city in all the world."

"I don't want to go to Minya."

"Ssshhh. I don't want to either."

He started crying, and she clutched him like Mama always did. "Sshhh, Sten. We'll be fine. Sshhh, it's all right."

It took a few minutes for Sten to quiet down. He was only six, not ten like Jannis. After shifting her cramped legs, she held him on her lap and sang softly to him. One of Mama's lullabies. The little snake in her stomach clenched again. She was so hungry. Would he feed them today? It had been so long since they'd eaten anything but the rotten turnips.

"My leg hurts."

"Sit up more," she said, a little impatient, heaving him up. "Is that better?"

There was a noise.

Jannis covered Sten's mouth and listened, because it sounded like a boot step. She watched the

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Artist Profile
Stan Wisniewski

Age: 47
Residence: Geneva, IL USA
Marital Status: married
Children: 0
Hobbies: working out, 3D computer animation
Personal Quote: Winners are just losers that never quit.
Favorite Book or Author: Michael Crichton
Started Painting In: I was copying photographs in grammar school, but my formal art education started in 1975.
Artist Most Inspired By: Frank Frazetta
Mediums You Work In: acrylic
Educational/Training Background:
Schools Attended: American Academy of Art in Chicago
Other Training: studied computer animation at Columbia College in Chicago.
Where Your Work Has Been Published or Displayed:
Dragon Con, World Con, Dreamstone in Australia
Where Someone Can Buy Your Art or Contact You Professionally: Some prints will be available at http://www.dreamstone.com.au or I can be contacted via my web site.
Web site URL: http://www.stanart.com/

Q: How did you come to be an artist?
A: I guess, like most artists, it picked me. I always painted as a child. Praise from parents and relatives encouraged me. It was easy to follow my passion, the trick is surviving in the real world.

Q: How would you describe your work?
A: Real without being photographic. I draw the idea first, then look for references to help flesh it out. I try to do a complete painting of color, drawing and composition. All three have to be strong for any kind of style to develop.

Q: Where do your get the ideas or inspiration for your art?
A: I have always had a good imagination. The difficulty is in getting it onto the canvas. I have tons of ideas that I could not sketch out, but these failures lead to other things. It is the classic case of problem solving.

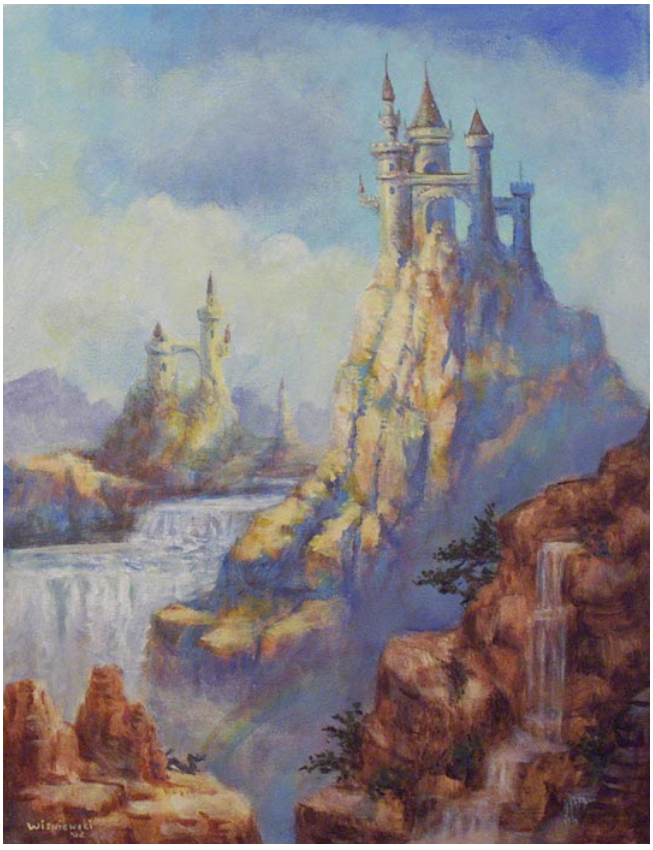
Q: What inspired this piece? (Tell us its story)
A: *Dragon Eggs:* This was inspired by a picture of the Grand Canyon. I tried to develop a dragon that was a combination of East and West. The pose was that of a vulture with its long neck.
Shogun's Slayer: The idea originally came from your typical hero statue in a park and a Frank Frazetta

painting. The dragon in the foreground was an after-thought. I was working on Eastern dragon sketches at the time, so Japanese 18th century armor seemed to fit.

White Water Watch Towers: I was inspired by the Hudson River School of painting. I was doing color sketches, trying to make a realistic rainbow. The waterfall was necessary for it. The idea of the towers came last. I needed something to balance out the composition.

Q: What influences have helped you become the artist you are?

A: By far, the biggest influence on my work has been the 25 years of rejection notices I've accumulated. I have learned to accept critical criticism, but I always look at the source before I act upon it. If I really admire another artist's work, then I can benefit from their advice. If I don't believe their work is strong or they don't even paint, then I just smile and dismiss it. Opinions are subjective, so you have to select the useful ones objectively.



Q: What has been your greatest success in your artistic career?

A: I have learned to persevere. I started studying seriously (life class drawing, copying the masters, constant sketching) when I was 19. Almost 30 years later, I am still painting in obscurity. I believe in myself, a belief that has stood through much adversity. The hardest part is to keep pushing yourself, looking at your work honestly. The less honest you are, the weaker it will be.

Q: What trends are you seeing in the Sci-Fi/Fantasy genre?

A: The biggest trend has been that form dominates. Dark colors with bright, smaller highlights are used to build this form. There is very little texture, except when something is metal. Dark shadows flow through and around everything. Composition is usually a foreground figure with a backdrop. The negative space of the backdrop is filled to complete a design. I think more fantasy artists will look to earlier masters of all genres, building their own style.

The Wishing Lantern
By Jeff Wheeler

Of all the bugs in the Valg Mordain, Hickem Tod liked eating moths the most. They were not the easiest to catch -- like scattergnats and jupeflies -- but they were delicious and soft, and it was easy picking the stems of their wings out of his foreteeth. Hickem Tod lived in the Valg Mordain swamp. He was a Ferzohg.

He hopped, and sometimes walked, through the wet reeds, searching for new things. One day he discovered a soggy pair of boots washed out of a stream, and he used the leather to make a belt and a pouch. Another time, he found a splintered coffer in a patch of snag-grass. There were lots of shieldbeetles crawling underneath it. They were crunchy and sweet. But not as tasty as a moth.

In the cool of the day, when the rains had stopped and the branches quit dripping, Hickem Tod heard the hum of a dragonfly behind a screen of thick rushes. He stopped at the screen and listened. Parting it a little with his cudgelstaff, his yellow eyes peeked inside. He blinked twice, seeing the dragonfly hover over a small pond.

His whip-tongue flicked out, its gooey tip sticking to the dragonfly's wings. Snapping the tongue back, Hickem Tod gulped the bug and chewed it up. He swallowed.

"Not too bitter -- just right for a dragonfly," he said.

Pushing past the reeds, Hickem Tod stopped at the edge of the pool. He dipped his thin green legs into the water and made circles. The ripples disturbed the water gnats skimming on the surface. He picked the dragonfly wings from his foreteeth and flicked them into the water. The shade by the pool was peaceful, and he sighed. Winks of sunlight danced on the water. Laying his cudgelstaff on the muddy banks, he twisted the beltpack around and unfastened the rat-head clamp. Poking through the strands of bitteroot and hard luckpebbles, he found a dead beetle. After chomping on it, Hickem Tod pulled out his reed flute. Raising it to his mouth, he blew. A sweet whistle rose over the gurgle of the pond.

"Who's there?" a woman's voice shouted.

Hickem Tod stopped, blinking slowly, and kept perfectly still. He hadn't heard anyone approach. He

We hope you enjoy reading The Wishing Lantern by Jeff Wheeler. The version you read in this issue of Deep Magic only contains a few of the paintings from the original. Artist Randy Gallegos, featured in the October 2002 issue, provided all the artwork for The Wishing Lantern. You can purchase a hardcopy version at Amazon.com. In addition, Amberlin Books may print a large-format softcopy in the coming months, so stay tuned!

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Continued from page 10

Desperately, she blurted, "And she promised it'd be very dear to her!" The entity solidified and with a thump collapsed on the floor.

"Yes!" She shouted and leapt out of her seat. She did a little dance around her desk, then walked slowly towards the little creature she had created. It was whimpering in a scrawny heap inside her spellcircle. She approached it slowly, hand outstretched.

It wasn't much to look at. One leg was longer than the other, so it sort of leaned to the left. It had four arms, placed at random locations around its yellow-green body, and one eye was red and one eye purple and the other one black. It looked up at her pitifully. She gently reached to touch it on the head. Lashing out, it sunk its tiny sharp teeth into her finger. Humming softly, Mellisa roughly grabbed it by the scruff of its neck and bound it up unmercifully in her sweater.

It struggled frantically in her arms. She nonchalantly whacked it upside the head, then spoke to it sweetly. The creature looked up at her in confusion and pain.

"Come on, you poor teeny thing," she crooned, "Mommy Witch will find you a blanket and you can have some chicken broth." She smiled at the sickly creature in her arms and ignored its steadily weaker struggles. She was rocking it and talking to it amiably as she walked out of the room.

Mellisa almost skipped up the school hallway carrying her hard-won bundle. She thought gleefully of those taunts of her classmates turning into jealous mutters. They wouldn't make fun of her anymore, that's for sure.

"There once was a fuzzball named Martid ..." she murmured to the helpless creature, "Who got me all that I wanted ...."

And so Mellisa, who in the depth of her seven-year-old despair had been about to give up and become a horse trainer or perhaps a potter's wife, discovered magic. Through her well-meaning tutor and a natural talent for painful rhyming, Mellisa the failure eventually became Mellissandra the Magnificent or Mellissandra the Maleficent, depending on whether you were addressing her highness herself, or her highness's badly-abused subjects. It is unknown, however, by what name the poor malformed creature thought of her. She kept it locked away in a room, you see, for they say that a familiar reflects the true soul of a Limwitch.

The End

Leave a message about this story

Continued from page 14

watch a movie, play chess, or hang out on Hollywood Boulevard?

The answers are complex and subtle. Aristotle understood them at least in part. By the time you finish reading this, I hope that you will understand it better than even he did.

In reviewing dozens of books on this topic, I have found that little original thought has been put to paper.

Aristotle recognized that we read to be *entertained*, and came to the conclusion that entertainment was achieved through a combination of emotional appeal and intellectual appeal. He noticed that some works that were emotionally satisfying offered no intellectual insight. Others that were emotionally dissatisfying were redeemed by insight. Still others that divulged reams of information were downright boring.

In short, he considered the appeal to be a pleasing combination of entertainment and insight.

For centuries, philosophers never went beyond this. Shakespeare agreed with Aristotle, as did his contemporaries, like Sidney.

I disagree with Aristotle.

There is more to pleasing fiction than these two ingredients. Entertainment is necessary for fiction to be pleasing at all. Insight may redeem otherwise trite entertainment, but its not necessary for pleasing fiction. And there are other basic ingredients, other *draws*, that Aristotle doesn't mention. I'm going to talk about a few of them.

But let me first explain why I disagree with Aristotle: he apparently never noticed that a story that gives us insight is pleasing not because it contains information, but because the information it contains has an emotional appeal. In other words, when you have a revelatory experience, when you feel that your head is going to explode or that you suddenly understand everything anew, you are also going through a profoundly *emotional* experience.

In essence, we are entertained by fiction because we anticipate an emotional experience.

But what is *entertainment*, and why do we crave it? I've never seen a definition that encompasses all types of entertainment, and there are many forms—sports, listening to music, attending parties, watching movies. I've known killers who killed for entertainment, women who tried to seduce men for entertainment. What do these have in common with fiction?

We have to answer that question before we can move on.

What is Entertainment?

Years ago, when I first began asking myself why people read, I really felt that the answers didn't mesh.

Professors in college said that we read for escape, or because we enjoy the beautiful sounds of words, or for insights.

Fine, I thought, but I can escape by getting out of the house. If I want beautiful sounds, I'll listen to Dan Fogelberg. If I'm looking to understand the world, I might be better off reading the encyclopedia.

Why do people crave stories, good stories, written down?

The answer came to me almost by accident. In writing classes, I had learned about Feralt's triangle. Feralt was French writer who studied what made successful stories and he said it like this: in every successful story, the story begins with a character who has a problem. As we read, the suspense rises; the problems become more complex and have more far-reaching consequences, until we reach the climax of the story, where the hero's fortune changes. Afterward, the problem is resolved, the tension diminishes, and the reader is allowed to return to a relaxed state.

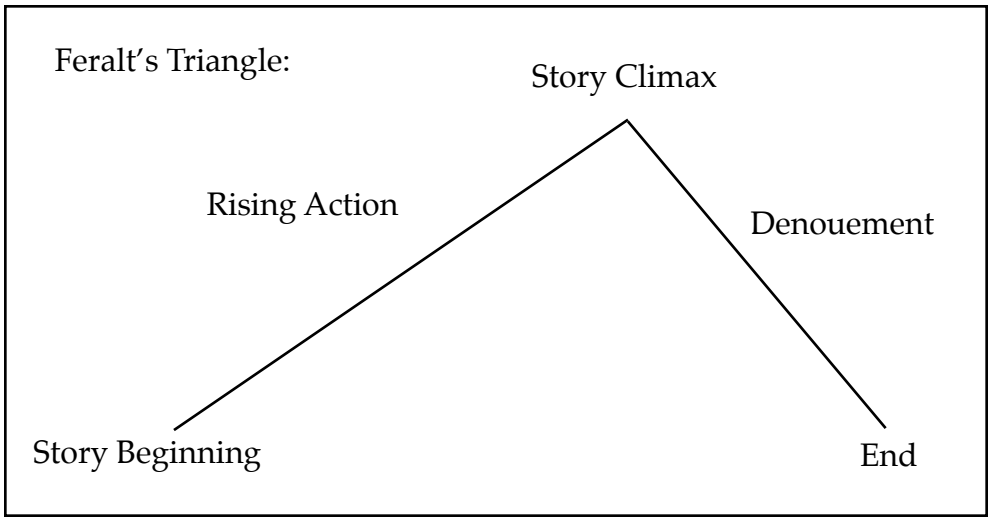
Article: Why Do People Read Fiction?

David Farland

He put it on paper like this (see image to the right):

His vision wasn't all that new or astonishing.

But one day, while I was reading an article on medicine, I suddenly found myself looking at a chart amazingly similar to Feralt's triangle, and it helped me understand in great part what it is that people call "entertainment."



The article explained some recent experiments on endorphins—internally created opiates that our body uses to help us control pain. You see, as we live through our daily lives, we constantly are faced with minor pains. Cells age and die, we get minor cuts and abrasions, and our body creates a certain low level of endorphins to help control that pain. In essence, our bodies are constantly drugging us.

However, when we get injured, when we feel more pain, the body responds. As your brain registers pain, it begins creating more endorphins in an effort to shut down the pain.

Eventually, the level of opiates produced matches the level of pain involved and the pain you experience diminishes. Depending on the severity of the injury, the process can take hours or days.

This is all very simple stuff. It's called a *biofeedback loop*, and the body uses it in thousands of ways. For example, as your body recognizes sugar in the bloodstream, it signals to the pancreas to begin secreting insulin so that you can metabolize the sugar. As your brain recognizes oxygen in your bloodstream, it allows you to relax your breathing, and so on.

The interesting thing about endorphin level to me was this: Everyone has a resting level of endorphins in their bloodstream, and based on this level, we each have our own threshold of pain. Thus, if you jab me with a pin to a certain depth, I will recognize pain at a very consistent level.

But what happens when I get injured, say severely cut, and my body raises the level of endorphins?

The answer is: I will feel less pain. The pinprick that hurt me a day before may go unnoticed the next, simply because I am naturally sedated.

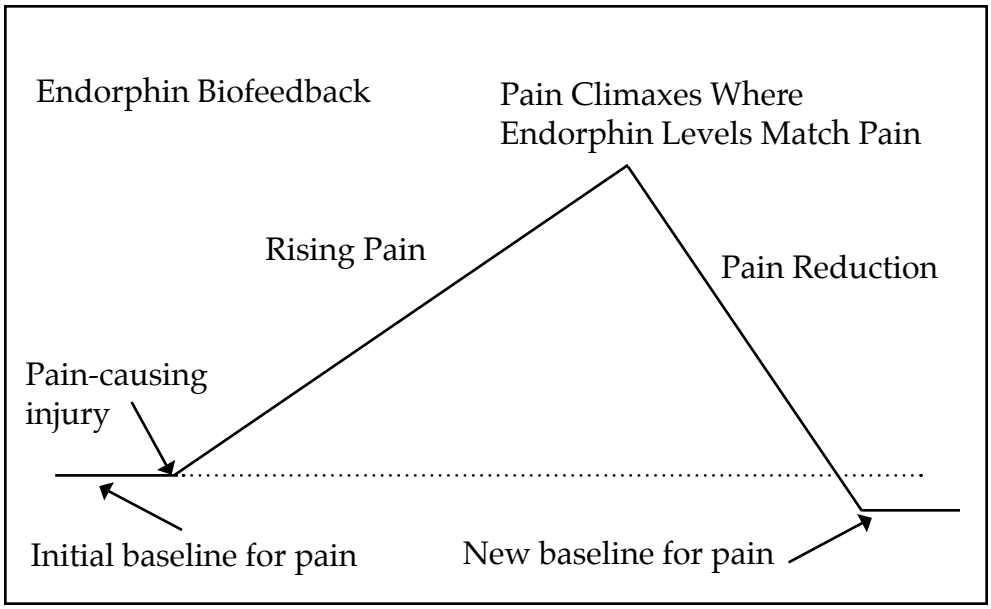
This is why runners, people who walk barefoot, or people who subject themselves to other rigorous and painful exercises generally have a much higher tolerance for pain than those who do not.

As I say, the biofeedback loops are everywhere in the body, and I studied them heavily back when I was in pre-med.

A couple of days after reading my article, I happened to meet a professor who was talking to a friend. This professor was discussing the latest romance novel she had read.

Now this fascinated me. The professor, a writing teacher, did not allow her students to write trashy genre fiction--romance, science fiction, fantasy, horror, westerns or anything of that ilk. She encouraged us never to read it, and I was flabbergasted to discover this . . . this deceit. Why, she was nothing but a hypocrite!

So I confronted her. She explained that she read romance to relax. When life got stressful, her job got hectic; it was a good way to unwind.



Indeed, once I began asking others why they read, the words "stressful" and "relaxing" began to crop up more and more.

But on the face of it, that answer is absurd! People go through tremendous difficulties in a novel. People get run over by cars or stalked by serial killers. People get emotionally damaged and struggle through constant turmoil. Books aren't relaxing!

And that's when I saw the answer. A story, a formed story that conforms to Feralt's outline, is a form of *emotional* exercise that allows us to handle stress.

Each of us has background stress in our lives, and each of us wants to cope with that stress. The stress may come from dangers in our marriage, or fear that we'll lose our jobs. It may have to do with concerns for our own health, or the health of a friend. It may have to do with deadlines or other time pressures. Right now, without thinking much, you can probably come up with a dozen stress-inducing problems that you have in your life.

To cope with life's little problems, we have but two options: we may either retreat from stress—by taking a vacation perhaps, or a night on the town—or we can perform exercises to help cope with the stress.

The fascinating thing about a novel is that it allows you to do both. By reading a book, to a degree you escape from your own life, your own world, and become immersed in a fictive universe. You are taking an emotional vacation.

But in order for the story to be really engaging, when you read, you must enter an imaginary world where you are placed in meaningful conflict.

In short, as many other authors have noted, the situations that are intolerable to you in real life are situations that you crave in fiction.

For example, only a madman would want to leave his home, his family, and his friends, get stalked by the nine Dark Riders, take a knife blade to the chest, battle orcs in the mines of Moria, nearly starve to death on the road, and confront Sauron in Mordor.

All of those things would be intolerable in real life. But we crave them in fiction. Here's why:

Your subconscious mind does not completely recognize the difference between your real experiences and those that occur only in the imagination.

So, when you become Frodo Baggins walking the road to the Crack of Doom, chased by dark riders, the subconscious mind responds to some degree as if it were really happening. When you are Robin Hood, grieving for your dead father, your mind responds as if it were really happening to you.

Indeed, the more completely you become immersed in the fiction, the more totally your body will respond.

How often have you found yourself reading a book with your heart hammering so badly that you had to stop? Have you ever found sweat on your brow and your breathing shallow? I have.

So the body responds. It says, "I thought life was bad at the office, but this stress is killing me! Let's handle it."

At that point, some biofeedback mechanism kicks in. Your body, in an effort to handle the imaginary stress, creates some type of endorphin-*like* substance to help you cope.

As a result, when you reach the climax to the novel, when you are standing at the Crack of Doom, you reach the climax of your emotional exercise.

When the story ends, and Frodo is safely back in his Hobbit hole reading from his book, your stress is released. You sit back in your chair and sigh, and say, "Wow, what a relief! I feel so much better!"

You've just performed an emotional exercise, and because of it, you will be better able to handle the little stresses in your day-to-day life. The little problems at the office seem to diminish in intensity, minor worries, and even the major catastrophes, aren't so intimidating.

In short, all forms of entertainment boil down to this: *Entertainment is an emotional exercise that we perform by putting ourselves at risk in some controlled way.*

Let me show you how reading relates to other forms of entertainment: in some forms of entertainment, we may put our very lives in jeopardy—such as when we are skydiving, mountain climbing, bungee jumping, auto racing, and so on. But in order for the activity to *entertain*, we must be able to control the element of danger. For example, jumping from an airplane, without a parachute is suicide. Jumping from an airplane with a parachute is entertainment. For me, racing a car at 600 mph would be suicide, but I'd feel fairly comfortable driving 140 mph. I once heard a cowboy say that he "liked a little target practice from time to time," but that didn't mean that he wanted to engage in a shootout every time he went to the bank. The sense of being in control of the danger is vital.

When we play a game of skill—such as chess, or golf—we put our own status on the line. We aren't placing ourselves in physical jeopardy, but we may put our place in society, our reputation, in jeopardy. This is particularly true in upper-level tournaments. So when we play sports, we still have the elements of placing ourselves in jeopardy in a controlled environment. Playing golf with my six-year old daughter might be a bore—there's no jeopardy. Playing Tiger Woods would merely crush my ego—I don't have enough control in such a contest. But trying to beat my best friend—and thereby either slightly raising or lowering my status in his eyes—could be entertaining.

In many games of skill we may not risk our health or reputation--instead we may risk our wealth. Poker, dog-racing, and many other games of sport are valuable as entertainment simply because we put money into them. The more money that we risk, the bigger the thrill. In short, we place ourselves in economic jeopardy. If you bet too much, the threat becomes unbearable. If you bet too little, it's not really interesting.

Do you see the relationship between reading and other forms of entertainment yet? Here it is: When we read, we buy into a shared dream, a shared fiction, and by doing so we put ourselves in *emotional* jeopardy.

To some degree, we thrust ourselves into the hands of a storyteller, trusting that he will deliver us safely from a daydream that swiftly turns into a nightmare. But we don't want to trust him too much. If the emotional jeopardy is too small, we get bored. If the emotional jeopardy is too great, we'll close the book. If the author abuses our trust—if for example he doesn't end the story, but leaves us instead in greater emotional jeopardy, we will no longer trust the author.

This same principal of trust applies to all forms of entertainment. Have you ever noticed that when your team is winning regularly, the stands at the football stadium rapidly fill up. We don't want to invest emotional energy in a team that will let us down. We don't want to play games we

can't win. We won't gamble on the lottery if no one ever wins.

So here is the secret that I couldn't learn in college: reading for entertainment generally works best only as we read formed stories—only if there is an ascending level of stress, of doubt as to the outcome, followed by a conclusion where the stress is relieved. In short, genre stories--romances, fantasy, westerns, etc.--sell well precisely because the audience does know how the story will end.

At the very heart of it, reading stories or viewing them allows us to perform an emotional exercise. This leads me to what I call the *"Stress-induction/Reduction Theory of Storytelling."*

The Stress-induction/Reduction Theory of Storytelling

In a nutshell, here are four of the most basic principles:

1) As an author I write fiction because I recognize that I am performing a service to my readers by doing so. They are looking for an emotional exercise, and it is my job to deliver. If I write unformed fiction--stories that have no ends, or stories that have displeasing ends--I'm not fulfilling the contract that readers are paying me for. In such a case, I will rightfully lose my readers.

2) If I do not create *enough* stress in my story, the story will bore the reader. If I create *too much* stress, the story becomes unbearable and the reader will put it down. My job is to create a pleasing level of stress.

3) Different readers want different levels of stress. Some people crave horror, just as some crave the adrenaline rush of sky jumping. I don't like either activity. At the same time, things that would bore me—say the story of a boy who wonders if he'll ever get his first car—may be perfectly suited to a person who craves a less-rigorous emotional exercise. Thus, I will never write a story that will perfectly please all readers.

4) In order to hold my reader, I must have a minimum amount of stress. At the same time, in order to make the story feel safe enough so that my reader gets emotionally involved, I have to make that stress level "safe." I do this by *transporting* my reader into another time, place, or persona. I must carry the reader through a waking dream, into an imaginary world. The degree to which I achieve transport directly affects the success of my story.

Achieving transport is vital to any tale, and perhaps there is no better time than now to touch upon it, and perhaps delve into some aspects that you might not have considered.

Other Elements of Fiction that Draw Readers

People don't read just to be entertained. While all forms of entertainment follow some common underlying principles, there are other reasons that people read, other "draws." We mentioned escapism before, and Aristotle was big on insight. Let's get down to a few more "draws" that attract readers.

Draw #1: Reader Transport

As I mentioned before, one way to escape your troubles is simply to do that--"escape." There is no better way to reduce stress than to get away from it. And while a story may allow us to perform an emotional exercise, it also allows us to escape our world for a while. This is a tremendous key to fiction. Let me show you something. Here is a list of the highest-grossing movies of all time:

Titanic
Star Wars
E.T.

Jaws
The Sound of Music
The Godfather
Gone with the Wind
The Exorcist
The Sting
The Empire Strikes Back
Batman
Jurassic Park

All of these movies have one thing in common: Each transports you in some way to another time or another place. Movies work great for transporting us into a new *external* environment--a different time or place. Books work better for transporting the reader through different *internal* worlds, into the mindsets of various authors and characters.

Transport Into the External World

When you consider methods of transporting your audience, new writers almost always recognize this aspect of transport.

As a novelist, by rigorously creating sights, sounds, smells, and textures, I create the reader's external environment. This is a primary component of your writing.

Thus, if I describe the blue shadows that bruise the rounded stones of a creek bed in the early morning, along the smell of drying algae, the cool wind on my character's face, and the splash of water as a trout rises to snatch a termite from its tortured flight—I begin to create the external world for the reader.

That sounds pretty dry and clinical, doesn't it? Let me put it another way.

Different readers enjoy different worlds. In fact, most readers become enamored of one particular setting for their stories. Some readers feel more comfortable in a medieval fantasy setting. They know that in the past they've had good times there. It is a safe setting. Nothing too terrible will ever happen, and there are lots of interesting possibilities.

A romance reader may prefer to retreat to the Regency period, and play out love fantasies amid the Napoleonic war. Others may favor the western frontier.

Some readers may find all such foreign settings uncomfortable, and prefer instead to stay home, in a place they know, like Rigby, Idaho or New York City.

Other readers purposely seek environs that are a bit threatening. For them, being thrust into an uncomfortable setting is a fixture, an added dimension of background stress that they find satisfying.

Your reader may even be a bold person, one who likes to explore harsh environments--brutal wars in the inner city, or life as a prisoner in a Thai jail.

As an author, you need to recognize that your reader will desire one of three types of transport: transport to a comfortable setting, transport to a neutral or familiar setting, or transport to an uncomfortable setting.

Transport Into an Interior/Emotional Realm

But creating a believable exterior world is only part of the challenge. Just as important is creating the interior world of your protagonists and antagonists.

By rigorously depicting honest emotions for your characters, with logical thoughts, and belief

systems, you transport the reader into the inner world of your characters. Any dishonesty, any mistake, invalidates the experience and jars the reader, thrusting him out of the story.

Be aware that this interior world is vital to your reader. Many readers seek out particular genres over and over again in an effort to experience a pleasant emotion. Your reader may be hoping that you will elicit love in a romance, wonder in fantasy, terror in horror, or that moment of insight in a mystery.

So you must learn to elicit these emotions from your reader. This means that you must gain as much mastery in depicting the internal world of your characters as you do in depicting the external world.

Usually when you try to transport a reader in the internal world, you transport him into the mind of another individual--your viewpoint character. Your viewpoint character may be comfortable, a decent guy whom most of us can empathize with. He may be a common man. Or he may be a twisted animal.

You need to recognize that no one protagonist is right for every reader or every story. For example, a cynical reader, one who believes that everyone is corrupt and that the world is going to hell in a hand-basket, will think that anyone who doesn't believe as he does is a fool.

A cynical audience will almost always require a cynical protagonist simply because they need someone to reinforce their worldview. They can't empathize with a "naïve" protagonist.

At the same time, I tend to be hopeful about the human race. For me, a cynical protagonist may be entertaining in small doses, but I really don't want to spend much time with one.

So when you're preparing to write, when you consider the internal worlds you want to depict in your story (a novel may have multiple protagonists, some who are naïve, some who are cynics), you must decide which type of protagonist(s) your story requires. In most cases, authors make this choice unconsciously. They write about people who think like they do.

An interesting hybrid of the internal and external environments are the societies that you visit. Your characters never exist in isolation. Depending upon the type of novel you're writing, the society can be vital. By carefully motivating your heroes, villains, and cast of your story, by showing their world and the feared or hoped-for consequences of each act, you create the society of your world.

Juggling the Elements that Lead to Transport--Creating a Pleasing Mix

As you depict the external and internal environments for your story, consider just how much your reader can tolerate.

It's a bad idea, for example, to create an uncomfortable world, a cruel society, and a monstrous protagonist, and then put your protagonist through greater hell. Your reader will opt out, sooner or later.

On the other hand, certain tales for a young audience may require you to pull your punch from time to time.

As an author you must never lose sight of this fact: the reader pays to be transported into your world in the hope of being entertained. You are his host, and should struggle to meet his every desire.

The Author as Tour Guide

Last of all you should recognize that you yourself are the ultimate transport. You are the reader's tour guide, if you will. While the reader engages in your fiction, he sees the world that you show him, thinks what you tell him, is caught like a fly in the web of your moral universe.

For literary readers, the author as transport is a tremendous part of the *draw*—the reason for

reading. An author who writes beautifully, who sees things that you don't see, who recognizes the causal connections in human relationships, who imbues his work with humor and warmth and wit becomes a powerful draw for the reader. Such authors allow us to become, for a moment, better than we are.

At some point, you have to confront yourself and ask: What kind of guide am I? Will readers be satisfied by what I've done? Will they come back to the next story I tell?

I'll touch on this topic again in a little bit.

Draw #2: On Arousing Secondary Emotions

Your reader reads primarily as an emotional exercise. That exercise lies at the heart of all forms of entertainment, but your reader isn't aware of it. Often the reader is far more aware of the secondary emotions that he or she is seeking.

I'm not going to talk too much about romance, horror, wonder, intrigue, or revenge literatures. Books have been written on each of those subjects. But there are some powerful things going on under the surface of each tale, and I must touch upon these.

When a reader decides to invest time in a tale, he does so because he is *drawn* to the work. He may believe that the novel's cover draws him, or a friend's recommendation. Most of the time, he has no idea what the real draws of a tale are, and usually there are a number of draws.

Let's talk about some.

Intimacy

In her book *Writing Great Screenplays for Film and TV,* Dona Cooper (an instructor at the American Film Institute Film School) points out that one compelling need that fiction fulfills is the need for intimacy. Albert Zuckerman suggests that we should look at tightening the relationships between our various protagonists and antagonists—making them old friends or family members. Another popular author insists that there should be a love angle in every story.

Do you understand that they're all saying the same thing?

It seems obvious that a woman who is reading three romance novels a week is craving intimacy. In the same way, books about families, such as Anne Tyler's *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant,* or Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie* may let us draw close to someone else's family experience, in essence adopting a family.

In my novels *Serpent Catch* and *Path of the Hero,* I deal with family relationships by having my protagonist actually take on surrogate fathers, looking for someone that he can emulate, until in the end he becomes a father himself.

So intimacy between families, friends, and lovers can be a big draw to your work, but it's not necessarily the only draw.

In fact, you should recognize that antagonists are normally more solitary than protagonists. Bad guys seldom have friends—just victims and accomplices.

As a prison guard, I knew lots of bad guys. Many of them were loners. Most of them were dangerous and abusive and needed to be alone, and so perhaps as an author one might think it valid to show that vile people usually do end up alone.

But it doesn't always work that way. I used to love watching one show on TV, *Wiseguy,* because it depicted a government operative infiltrating the mob, and each time he did so, he found out that the crook he had to nab had a loving wife or children.

These people were devastated by the antagonist's arrest. It gave viewers a powerful disincentive for committing crimes, and highlighted the personal tragedy that abounds in the

criminal lifestyle.

Not only was it astonishing on TV, it was true to life. As a prison guard who used to monitor phone calls between inmates and their family members, I was sometimes amazed at how a gangster or ruthless killer could have enviable, tender relationships with his wife and children.

But far more often than not, I was equally amazed at how callous and abusive cons could be. I recall once seeing a fight where two inmates (men who were best friends) had begun to wrestle playfully. The wrestling match soon escalated, and in the midst of it, one inmate decided to gouge out his friends' eyes.

So look at your characters, consider how and when to create intimate connections. How intimate are your characters with others? Do they have family members, friends, pets, or plants?

You need to understand, I think, what's at the core of this desire for intimacy.

Many avid readers are people who feel isolated from or rejected by society. The nerdy teenage boy reading his science fiction or the lonely girl with her own *Babysitter's Club* fantasies are seen so often that they have become clichés.

I believe that the drive for intimacy is such a powerful underlying force in fiction that it needs to be considered on all of its levels.

When you write about character interactions, particularly if you offer insights into those interactions, you let your reader vicariously participate in relationships that they only hope to have—or maybe fear to have.

You can help answer questions like: How would it be to be popular? How can I make a man or woman love me? When is it appropriate to share my own emotions with a lover? What will it be like to be a mother, a father, a grandmother? What if my mother died tomorrow? What are the consequences of an illicit affair? Is it okay to be weird? How can I break off a relationship?

Hence, most scholars consider tales about human relationships to be the highest form of literature not only because they can help us better understand our relationships, society, and ourselves, but because they let us vicariously participate in life. In short, such tales give us vital information about how to live.

But they do more. Stories change us. Did you ever notice that those nerdy boys and lonely girls—the kids reading the books—were usually the nicest kids that you knew when you were growing up? They were the most empathetic ones, the most likely to notice when you were down and treat you decently. At least, that's how it seemed to me. I still remember Tammy Jones and Sarah Krump from school. They always had their noses in books, but if you wanted some good company to talk to, they were the ones to find.

I suspect that the reason for this phenomenon is that there is often no more intimate way to share experiences than through the written word. There is no more prolonged exercise for gaining empathy than to read. Movies generally can't give it to you in quite the same measure. Movies don't let you in on a characters thoughts, perceive the world through as tight a focus, which is why there is still an audience for books while so many other mediums beckon.

Literature is more intimate than other mediums, and we only learn empathy as we view the world through another's eyes.

Reading can help us learn to be human.

For that reason, I think it's important for an author to be virtuous. This gets back to the whole notion of the author acting as a tour guide.

As a narrator, you may never directly speak in your work. But through your characters, dialog, and narrative you may at times want to show yourself as being witty, eloquent, perceptive, honest, generous, imaginative.

If your work does not embody some virtues, you will not gain an audience. Indeed, you'll never get published.

Your reader needs to be impressed. When he or she gets done reading (preferably not while they're reading), you want the reader to notice something outstanding about your work. I don't particularly care what that something is. But the reader should say, "Whoa, that was great. I've never read such a gut-wrenching death scene," or "I loved the twists at the end," or "I've never seen characters come alive like that!"

You must struggle to be a good host.

Even as you seek to create an intimate experience for your reader, you should also be aware of the dangers. When you write, it may well be that you invite your readers into the most intimate relationship of their lives. For awhile, the reader sees the world through your eyes, smells what you smell, thinks as you think, inhabits your moral universe, journeys through your imagination, and feels the thrill of your secret desires.

If you are wise, considerate, clever, imaginative, funny, loving—if you are a gracious host, the reader will connect with you emotionally in ways that you may not anticipate—or desire.

There is one more thing that I should say about intimacy. Most authors recognize at some time in their careers that they might be writing about themselves and their problems. That's a dangerous thing to do.

When you're at a party, you wouldn't want to sit and talk to someone who only talks about himself, would you? He's a boor.

Readers may want to read about your problem once, but they won't do it forever. If you write four novels about being an abused child, the readers will accept only one.

In the same way, recognize that you need to be writing about things that your reader cares about—universals like love and death and beauty. Your relationship with your reader needs to be one where you give a lot.

It's in your best interest to talk to your readers about themselves. Young people want to read about other young people. Sportsmen like reading about sportsmen. Drug addicts like reading about druggies. In other words, many readers are drawn toward characters that they already understand and empathize with. This helps your reader connect with your work.

Other readers like exploring the world through the eyes of someone different from themselves. Thus, an elderly person may be delighted to see the world through the eyes of a child, or the hearing to explore the soundless wastes of a deaf woman in a city.

Also, remember that in a book, you don't have to settle for one protagonist. Your cast may include all kinds of people—men, women, children, the elderly. A wide cast will often widen the audience appeal to your work.

But at some point, your reader needs to see beyond the veil of words, and recognize that you haven't been talking about yourself, or society, or others in your world.

Your reader should learn more about himself or herself than she thought possible. Your readers should discover that you've been talking about them all along.

Draw #3: Resonance

Most readers are completely ignorant both of what resonance is and how it affects them. The term *resonance* is taken from music. It means to gain strength by echoing a musical refrain that was played before.

In the same way, your work echoes with or "resonates" with other works. Always remember that your work does not stand alone. It is a part of the body of all literature. Everything that you

write may bring echoes of other works to mind.

T. S. Eliot founded a whole school of writing on this notion, and his works, like the "The Wasteland," and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Pruffrock," can only be understood if one has read the dozens of works that his poems echo.

Those who are well-read in fantasy, science fiction, westerns, romance novels, and so on recognize that each genre has its own "secret language" that readers from other genres usually do not fully understand.

Thus, when a romance writer waxes eloquent about Jackson Strong's "languid grey eyes," I really have no idea why she spells gray with the British spelling, or why heroes always have to have grey eyes. How many men in the real world have grey eyes? How many heroines have violet eyes? People don't have violet eyes, not really—except in romance novels.

Yet romance writers write about them all the time. Nor do I have a "throbbing manhood" or other anatomical parts that sometimes get mentioned by romance writers.

As one of the uninitiated, I don't quite understand the language—though it is precise and is obviously meant to elicit emotions. What I really don't understand is how the story resonates with other works from its genre. Somewhere, some British love interest had grey eyes, and so the type keeps cropping up. But I don't know or care where it started.

So the genre has evolved its own language and code words.

As far as I can tell, all genres have their own special code words, phrases, names and whatnot. I call these "resonators." In fantasy, I can hardly mention the "shadowed oaks," the "horned moon," "the kiss of a blade," or the "sulphurous scent of dragon's breath" without arousing some nostalgia on the part of the reader.

Thus, by conjuring these images, my work resonates with others in its field.

You need to read widely in the field that you are writing so that you can master the use of resonators.

New writers seldom recognize the power of this tool. I've often read short stories by novice authors where some soldier is sitting in a bar, drinking a bear and talking with his buddies, when suddenly at an insult, the fellow whips out his sword and lops someone's head off.

A sword? I wonder. Where did that come from?

Though I may suspect that the story is a fantasy before the sword is ever drawn, I'm often not sure because the tale lacks the proper resonators. There is a difference between a "glass of beer" and a "yeasty mug of ale." There is a difference between a cold draft that breathes down your neck, and one that nips like the teeth of a wolf cub. The difference has little to do with technical accuracy. It has to do with resonance.

The first descriptions I mentioned would not resonate with a fantasy reader. But the second description does. It evokes a place that is at once familiar yet hints at wonder.

There are a number of ways that stories may resonate. Descriptions carry resonance, as mentioned above, as do names of characters and places. For example, the name Gerald probably won't resonate with fantasy readers, but the name Gareth will. Kathy doesn't resonate, but Caithen does.

Titles of novels can also resonate. For example, *Robinson Crusoe* was a famous novel long before *Swiss Family Robinson* came out, and even as a ten-year-old boy I had to wonder "Robinson? That's not a Swiss name? So why name them Robinson?" The answer is obvious in retrospect. The name Robinson hinted at characters caught on a desert island. It resonated.

Plots may also gain strength through resonance. If you write a novel about growing up, or a gunfight in the Old West, or WWII, it will carry echoes of all the novels written before it. This may

be a good thing, particularly if you tell that story better than anyone before you. Some people like to read stories about growing up, the Old West, and WWII. You've got a ready-made audience, people who want to enter your fictive universe.

But imagine that you decide to write a story about a young boy who discovers an alien and wants to keep it as a pet. Immediately you have stepped into the shadow of Spielberg's *E.T.* Do you really want to invite such comparisons?

When writing literature intended to arouse wonder, your story had better be spectacular in some new ways, or you'll need to find another story.

Resonance can also become internal within your own work. As you write, and your characters develop their own personalities, they will build up resonances, too. For example, if your character grips his fist and argues loudly before he engages in a fight, by the time that you get to your third fight scene with that character, the reader will recognize what's afoot, and will begin to become excited well before the fight begins. This can be especially thrilling if he's doing it just before he initiates a fight he can't win. For example:

It wasn't right, Gareth thought to himself—the way the king's guards had cut that merchant down in the streets. They'd left him in a muddy heap in the road, all for two silver hawks in back taxes. A cold wind whipped through the inn, nipping at Gareth like the teeth of a wolf cub. A patron had just slunk out the door, in a hurry to be away from the king's guard.

Gareth hoisted his fifth yeasty mug of ale, swallowed it down, and staggered to his feet. He'd left his axe in his room, but he was undeterred. He clenched his fist and bellowed at the king's guards who sat playing dice around the hearth, "Cowards! Dogs all of you, to give your honor to a miserable wretch like Connal!"

One by one, the six guardsmen in their black livery turned to Gareth, and leered to see him standing there alone.

His fists clenched white around the handle of his mug. Gareth held it like a cudgel, and squinted to make out the men over there. He lurched toward them, knocking over a stool. "Come you bastards!" he spat. "I don't fear death—or the likes of you!"

Well, you know what happens. Gareth is likely to be killed—or if he's lucky, maybe just left for dead. You should strive to create such resonances.

At the same time, you should be aware that mainstream authors have their own techniques for creating resonance. They rely upon the shared experiences of their readers. They may invoke religious sources for symbolism, or foreshadow death. They may precede a scene by making bold statements about the general nature of life, so that the scene itself seems to be more universal or weighty than we might otherwise imagine. They might do it by naming chapters or other divisions in a book (e.g., Chapter 22: On Death and Rebirth) or through various other techniques.

Read More About It: For information on creating resonance, read *Stein on Writing,* by Sol Stein, Chapter 31. Also, George R. R. Martin and Robert Jordan are masters at the use of resonance in fantasy. Read descriptive passages to see how they use resonance in place names, in actions, and so on.

Draw #4: Growth and Stagnation

It's difficult to overstate how intricately entwined the concept of growth is in fiction. Most readers have no clue that they are avidly reading either one of two types of literature—growth

literature, or stagnation literature.

For examples of growth fiction, look at a couple of recent movie hits—"Good Will Hunting," and "As Good as it Gets."

In both stories, every major character grows during his relationship. It's becoming a motif in Hollywood, the latest fad. But it's not a new thing.

In fact, this pattern of growth remains consistent through nearly all great works of fiction ever written. (I only say "nearly" because as soon as I say *all,* someone is going to come up with something that doesn't have growth, like Hemmingway's *The Sun Also Rises,* and then we'll have to argue all day about whether it was great literature.)

Note that in literary fiction, it is often said that the characters should merely "change," not grow. But it is not nearly so enjoyable watching the demise of a protagonist as it is to watch one succeed. Change may intrigue, but growth inspires.

Indeed, here's a key not only to understanding characters, but to understanding people: look at anyone who is feeling anger, depression, or sadness. Look at anyone who is acting out or trying to attract attention, and you will nearly always find one common factor. The person feels somehow frustrated with his life. He's not growing, not progressing. It may be that he's frustrated with his economic fortunes, his love life, or his health, but somewhere these feelings of sadness, worry, and anger are rooted in frustration.

We need to progress.

Let me show you something that illustrates how growth is used in stories. Earlier I spoke about Feralt's triangle. Here's my hourglass of evil. Below you will find an X, which represents an hourglass. The story is the sand within that hourglass, flowing toward the conclusion.

A pattern emerges in many of the world's most popular stories. Consider for example *A Christmas Carol, It's a Wonderful Life, Lord of the Rings, Dune* and *Ender's Saga.*

In each of the tales that I mentioned, the protagonist starts out viewing evil as something outside himself. Poverty is not a problem that Scrooge normally worries about. The Dark Lord is in lands far away. The Buggers are on another planet.

But evil soon strikes closer to home. The protagonist discovers that it's in the people around him. Scrooge discovers that his best employee is suffering from poverty. Frodo confronts his Boromir. And young Ender Wiggins discovers that children who should be fighting evil are cruel and divisive.

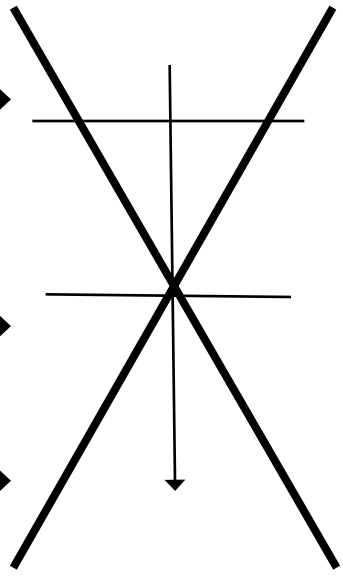
Eventually, the protagonist of course discovers evil in himself. Scrooge sees himself as the moral pauper, Frodo claims the ring at the Crack of Doom, and Ender discovers that he himself is a killer. When the protagonist

Story Progression

Childhood: Early in the tale, at the top of the hourglass, evil is seen as something distant, existing outside one's self. Evil is portrayed as an invasive force, perhaps an army or distant threat. One is helpless to counter it. Here is where the story begins.

Adolescence: At adolescence, children develop a social consciousness. Evil is recognized as being all around us. Friends and adults that we trust may turn on us. One may only counter evil with great difficulty, and is in greater danger on it. Here is the middle of the story.

Adulthood: As adults we recognize that we ourselves are evil. Once that recognition occurs, often at the crisis point of the story, we become capable of rejecting evil - cleansing ourselves. Afterward, our hero can also cleanse society and the world at large.



recognizes that evil is not a distant thing, that it's something within him, he sees a way to change.

Eventually he'll be able to not only affect change in himself, but also in the people around him and the greater world at large. That's what the hourglass of evil is all about. That's the purpose of the mythic journey, and that's what growth literature boils down to. Growth tales can be very compelling.

But you should also know that all literature isn't growth literature. Much literature—even some very popular literature, is about stagnation. It may let us retreat from issues of growth, and return to that safe place we all occupied before we had to grow up.

In stagnation literature, the protagonist is almost always stuck at the adolescent level. He never grows up. He doesn't engage in adult activities—such as marriage, the raising of children, taking a day job, or caring for an elderly parent. Instead, he remains an adolescent, without responsibilities, without ever recognizing his own need for change.

Let's take a look at a classic: Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End*. The name suggests a growth novel, but in this one, aliens who look curiously like Christian devils invade the world. They're brilliant and they teach mankind a great deal. Eventually, the whole world becomes a hive-like organism in which people are but drones, and human society evolves into something new—and mankind leaves the planet. The only person left on Earth is a protagonist who refused to participate in the exodus. He remains alone and damned, the perpetual adolescent—and apparently unsure whether he has won something or lost.

In the same way, Heinlein's characters never grow up. They like to go around saving the world, but have no day job. They recognize that everyone around them is wrong, but they're . . . well, they're supermen. They don't fall in love; they just have lots of sex. In essence, his protagonists too are always trapped in the adolescent state, and they have no desire to move beyond it.

In short, growth is unimportant in these tales simply because this is "transport" literature. The story transports the reader back to a safe time in his life, and that is the major appeal of the tale.

In case I make it sound as if only science fiction literature is adolescent/stagnation literature, let me assure you it's not. In fact, if you look at literary stories—the kind you read in *The New Yorker*—you'll find that most of it is stagnation literature. Oh, sure, the college professor may be burdened with a wife and child, but he's also usually out exploring sexually, discovering that his life is meaningless, and wallowing in sophomoric angst. In short, he's an adolescent trapped in a world where he doesn't want to grow up.

Of course many people read in an effort not to confront their challenges, but to evade them. They don't want to grow up while reading fiction. Such challenges are perhaps too discomforting for entertainment—the conflicts become too personal, strike too close to home.

Think about it. Ultimately, when your character reaches adulthood, he accepts personal responsibility for the world's state of affairs and then spends the rest of his life in service to his family and community. In essence, he accepts a kind of death, the death of his personal desires and dreams.

To me, this insight is tremendously funny. In literature classes, I used to hear professors deride that nasty "genre" literature because it was mere "escapism." But what they didn't realize is that real escapist literature is *stagnant* literature, and stagnant literature isn't confined to any one genre. Indeed, romances, westerns, fantasy, science fiction, mysteries and thrillers are all often growth literatures, while the stuff published as fine art is sometimes as musty as it gets.

So, my challenge as a writer of growth literature is to figure out how to get beyond that. How do I sell the message that growth is good and necessary and beautiful?

That's easy. You simply show that the community is good, that family is necessary and beautiful, so that when your protagonist sacrifices himself for these things, we as an audience see the

beauty in it.

You need to recognize as an author whether you are writing growth or stagnation literature.

Draw #5: Reading for Insight

As I said before, we read for insight very often in order to get the emotional rush that accompanies that insight.

Even if you don't want to write for insight, even if you don't plan to teach, you're stuck. The fact is that no matter how you try to avoid it, *you will be teaching something*. If nothing else, your work will reinforce your own worldview.

So, the time may come when you want to write for insight. In a later chapter, I discuss in detail how to do this.

But here are a couple of minor points. First, readers all learn differently. I tend to recall most (92.7%) of what I hear. In a world where most of our school information is delivered in lectures, that gives me a great advantage over the average person.

But some people learn better by watching. For them images convey information faster and are remembered longer. It's true that more of the brain is devoted to processing optical images than verbal communications. Recognizing this, for decades educators have tried to induce teachers to usual more visual aids—more charts, brighter colors, more pictures.

But there is one more way in which we learn, one that the school system often ignores: *Most people retain best those lessons learned by experience*.

When we read a story, we learn from it by participating in its imaginary incidents. The fact that we learn by experience lies at the very heart of storytelling.

Let me try to illustrate. I have a two-year-old boy. The other day he was playing near the stove, by some boiling water. He insisted on standing nearby while mom worked.

I warned him about the hot water. I had him hold his hand close to the burner. I forcefully tried to tell him about the danger, and to show it to him.

But being a two-year-old, he had to touch the burner anyway. Once he experienced the heat, he learned.

The same is true with us as we read fiction. We enter a fictive universe and participate in vicarious learning experiences. Our brains are so designed that we remember best those things that we learn in an emotionally charged atmosphere. The climax of a book, which should be emotionally charged, provides a perfect time for an author to provide his insights.

For many people this is an enormous attraction. The lessons we bring as authors can convey vital information.

So long as the author succeeds in making the information *relevant* to the reader, the reader will remain hooked. In other words, even large lumps of information can hold your readers' interest if you succeed in making that information relevant.

As an adolescent, I loved reading about kids out in the woods. Any story that had an encounter with a bear, or a mountain lion, or people struggling to survive in the wilderness—I read it voraciously.

In my neck of the woods back in Oregon, we had bears and mountain lions that would come down from the hills when it snowed. I often suspected that knowing how to handle the critters might save my life. And, in fact, at age eighteen when I was at one time confronted by a mountain lion, the stories I'd read had prepared me well enough so that I didn't try to run from it, thus luring it into an attack. Instead, I consistently turned to face the lion, which kept circling me in the brush, trying to get at me from behind.

But there are other kinds of vital information that a novel can carry. For a teenage girl, learning which brand of lipstick won't smear might loom enormous. Attracting a mate is vital information, after all.

American history in particular is relevant to me, because it helped shape the world I live in. I can't understand the world without understanding history. Hence, historical novels sell.

As a child without friends, learning how to be a friend might be important. Or as a woman preparing for childbirth, reading about young mothers might provide a draw.

Indeed, human conflicts and interaction lies at the heart of most stories. That's because other people are so separated from us. We each have our own thoughts, our own histories and viewpoints, and we can't really ever connect to others. Each of us lives in horrible isolation.

We often have a difficult time understanding who other people are, or imagining what they will do.

So, much of literature is therefore devoted to characters who try to understand one another and their place in the universe. In order to write this kind of fiction well, you must probe your characters deeply, view them with precision, and understand them better than your audience does.

On Dispensing Information

Obviously, information can be a big attraction in your story. People are fascinated by what it's like to be a "Top Gun," a cop, a lawyer, a doctor, a hit man, or how to perform any of dozens of other glamorous-sounding jobs. In the same way, they may be curious about life in the middle ages, or how to make candles, or how a Viking performed surgery, or any of a thousand other topics. Don't be afraid to include information—even at the expense of pacing.

Information may be necessary to transport your reader into another time or place. A hundred years ago, any novel set outside of London had to be three inches thick just so that the author could describe life in Wales or France. Now, through television, we know a lot more about our own world, so less is needed.

But most readers don't know a lot about historical settings, so novels in that genre tend to be longer. The same is true for science fiction and fantasy novels, where a whole universe complete with plants, animals, cultures, languages, and histories may need to be conveyed..

But be careful about including so much information that it hinders the story—or adding information only because you found it interesting. In other words, just because you know a lot about pig anatomy, it doesn't mean you should force it into your story.

Your information should generally be presented smoothly and quickly. Don't spend fifty pages up front telling us how a steam engine operates. Keep the plot going, unless you have good reason to slow it down. Sometimes your audience may need a breather, and a set piece that describes how the world works can provide that opportunity. Look for ways to plug information into those slots.

It's easy to sound brilliant in a book. You can research any topic and work it into the text. In fact, it's pretty much necessary. If you're going to write science fiction, you need to understand how planets form atmospheres and oceans, how spaceships can be propelled, how time machines might theoretically work, the basics of cloning, and a hundred other topics.

If you're writing a historical, you should know what historical characters are alive at the time you're writing, and where they live. You should know the recent history of the area that you're writing about, people's mannerisms, customs, attitudes and mores.

If you're writing medieval fantasy, you really ought to learn a great deal about horses, life in a rural setting, how to sharpen a sword, what foods to grow and how to grow them, and so on.

If you venture into more complex topics—such as human relations, secrets of the heart—make sure that the information is valuable. Far too often I see writers trying to pass off dumb truisms or the latest psychobabble as if they were pearls of wisdom. Don't filter your observations on human nature through psychology texts. Shakespeare never read Freud, yet he managed to write about Lady Macbeth just fine.

Immature writers and unobservant writers seldom offer genuinely wise insights into life. Yet when you are writing, when you are examining life closely and consistently, it becomes difficult not to have some insights.

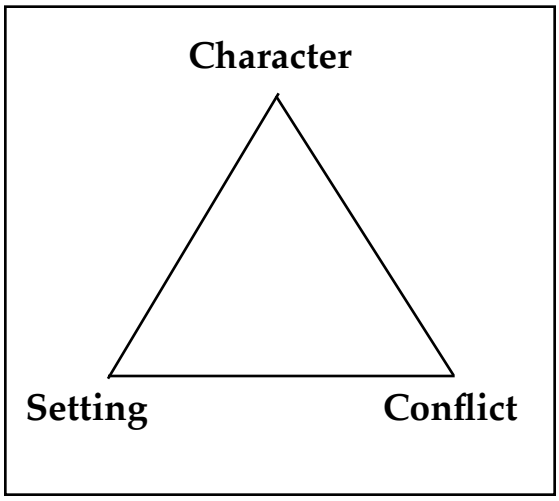
If you don't have great insights into life, don't knock yourself out. Rely on what you learn from others, or concentrate on telling stories that entertain more than they teach.

A Note on the Dangers of Being Too Relevant

As I mentioned a moment ago, one of the big draws to any story is relevance. In order to engage emotionally, on some level your reader must recognize that your story is *about* him or her.

At the same time, the reader does not want the story to be too relevant. In fact, the more dangerous your conflict, the more the reader will desire to withdraw into fantasy. *In order to create a pleasing fictive world, you must create a balance between a universe that is simultaneously irrelevant and relevant*.

There are three primary areas where you may establish relevance: in the setting, in the depiction of character, and in the depiction of conflict. So, when creating your story, in order to create a safe environment you need to look at your tale this way:



Here are the points to keep in mind: In order for the fictive dream to be "safe," one or more of these three elements needs to be depicted fantastically. In order for it to engage the reader, one or more needs to be relevant.

If all three of these elements are relevant, then we are writing nonfiction. If all three of the elements are irrelevant, there is a strong chance that your audience will never become engaged at all.

Relevancy in Setting

The closer you hit to the reader's home, both temporally and spatially, the more relevant the setting. A story set two thousand years ago in Orem, Utah may not seem very relevant to me in the just same way that a story set in contemporary Mongolia may seem irrelevant to me.

Placing the story in my own backyard, beginning an hour from now, establishes a high degree of relevance.

Placing the story in an imaginary world makes the setting irrelevant to me—and therefore comfortable. That's why so much category fiction is set in a world removed from our own.

Please note when looking at the best-selling movies of all time, nearly all of them are placed in fantastical settings. The same is true of the best-selling novels and poems of all time. (Consider for example Homer's *Odyssey,* Dante's *Inferno,* Shakespeare's *The Tempest,* and so on.)

Relevancy in Character

The more that your reader has in common with the protagonist, antagonist, and supporting

cast, the more relevant the tale.

Your characters may be separated from your reader by species, gender, age, social status, mannerisms, intelligence level, or any of a hundred other ways. So it's important to keep your audience in mind. Are you writing to a wealthy audience, an intelligent audience? Then a wealthy and intelligent protagonist will be most accessible. Are you writing to the bottom-feeders of the inner city? Then you know what kinds of characters your reader will find relevant.

The closer that your character comes to the "Everyman," the more that the average reader is likely to identify with him or her.

Relevancy in Conflict

The more that you deal with conflicts that are meaningful to the average reader, the more strongly your reader will engage with the story.

Conflicts that are relevant to every person include death, love, suffering, loneliness. These are pretty universal.

But some conflicts that might seem universal aren't. Is the hunger for freedom a universal conflict? Or the need to be an individual? In eastern philosophy, a man is pretty much defined by his group. A person who strives for individuality and freedom may be considered aberrant.

Realism vs. Fantasy as Tools for Gaining Reader Interest in Fiction

As I've said, when you portray a setting, character, or conflict, the more realistic the portrayal, the more easily your reader can be transported into your fictive universe. It's easier to imagine, to connect with, a world like the one we live in, with people like us, who have problems similar to our own.

Thus, by concentrating on realistic portrayals of these elements, you make it easier for your reader to enter your fictive universe, you make your work accessible.

But most people don't read in an effort to enter a world *just like* their own. They want to escape their world in one way or another. (Even readers who think that they are reading realistic literature aren't. There will almost always be a strangeness or some form of irrelevancy in the tale.) So the fiction that is easiest for a reader to enter on the level of intellectual accessibility may not be emotionally satisfying. It may not draw them.

If, on the other hand, any of these elements—setting, character, or conflict—are depicted in a fantastical way, you create an irrelevance to the work that makes it easier for your reader to become emotionally engaged. The irrelevancy in the piece is the door that allows the reader to gain entrance to your fictive world.

Fantasy and realism are not really at odds. There are sliding scales involved. A character may be realistic in a dozen ways, but fanciful in one or two. A fantasy world may be just like our own, with one important difference. So when you look at the level of realism in a tale, you may have to study it closely to find out where the fantasy elements lie.

Let's take a look at some examples of stories that work from the movies.

"The Sound of Music"

Relevant/Irrelevant Setting—Austria in WWII is removed from us both in time and place. It's a safe setting because we know that Hitler will ultimately be defeated, yet at the same time it's a dangerous setting.

Relevant/Irrelevant Character—Maria embodies hope and exuberance, while at the same time showing her immaturity. The fact that she's a nun makes her distant, irrelevant, from most of

humanity. There are certain common human relationships that she doesn't want to get involved in.

Relevant Conflicts—The search for love, independence, and meaning in life combines with the relevant conflict of the war.

"Star Wars"

Irrelevant Setting—imaginary worlds

Relevant/Irrelevant Characters—Luke is something of the everyman, the touchstone for most people, yet he has the Force powers with him. Solo, Leia, and Chewbacca each embody some strengths that all of us would like to emulate, but all are obtuse.

Relevant conflicts—The struggle for independence is a hallmark of children's and adolescent fiction, but is still relevant for adults. Beyond that, Luke's growing powers are a metaphor for anyone who is growing up. They represent the growing sense of power that every child gains—growing strength, growing procreative powers, growing intellect and responsibility—as he or she nears adulthood.

"Dr. Strangelove"

Relevant/irrelevant Setting—it showed the world as it was when released, but concentrated the images on places that the common public doesn't see, such as military bases, the interior of planes, Russia, and so on.

Irrelevant/Relevant Characters—all characters were so eccentric as to be comic in their way, yet they were placed in roles that were relevant to the viewer.

Relevant Conflict—the nature of the conflict itself, global war, was so threatening, that it was on everyone's mind in the mid-60s.

Here is an example of a recent movie that didn't work well, since it lacked relevance:

"Cat's Don't Dance"

Irrelevant Setting—a cartoon version of Hollywood.

Irrelevant Characters—cartoon animals.

Irrelevant Conflicts—a character who wants to star in musical movies is dealing with an adolescent conflict, not a child's conflicts. This movie missed its intended audience.

You will notice that most children's movies that fail do so precisely because they are completely irrelevant to their audience. If your character in a fantasy world is called a Bloopa (he's a blue ball), and he is on a quest to find his sacred stone, there is absolutely nothing for the child to identify with, so the child tunes out.

But consider the tale, "The Princess Bride." Here's one that worked with an irrelevant setting, largely irrelevant characters, and tremendously exaggerated conflicts. What an oddity? Want to know the trick of how to make it work? Read on:

Creating Rooting Interest

Most of us probably recognize that the world of professional sports is irrelevant to us. It doesn't matter whether the Jazz or the Lakers win the next world championship.

That's why the various professional leagues pay sports announcers big bucks to try to convince you that it <u>is</u> relevant. In most cases, they will feed you the line, "The entire season for the _____ (enter team name) may well hinge on this game!"

Big deal.

Or they may try to convince you to join the crowd. "The folks here in _____ (fill in the name of the city) are on the edge of their seats tonight!" And of course they say it in such an exciting tone, that you realize that you should be on the edge of your seat, too.

A better tactic is to promise an "All-out war!" between the teams, so that even those who don't give a hoot about the teams or the record are at least promised a good fight.

The best tactic of course is to make the match personal. "As you may know, the quarterback _____ had a tragic loss this past week; his dog, a faithful companion for the past six years died, and he's dedicated the game to Rover."

In other words, in each case the announcer tries to involve you in the story of the teams. He tries to get you to identify, so that you'll have a rooting interest in the game.

This works for sportscasters in the same way that it does in fiction. My wife gets so worked up during Jazz games, that if our team is down by ten points, she just can't take the pressure and has to leave the house muttering naughty words.

The same thing happens in your story. You can make an irrelevant setting relevant, an irrelevant character relevant, and so on, in order to gain the reader's rooting interest.

You do this by creating, for just a moment, the illusion that your character, setting, and conflicts are real. Perhaps agent 007 has a real, human moment. Or maybe you reach out and portray your medieval fantasy setting so perfectly that it comes alive, or maybe you portray a realistic conflict.

As you do this, you gain some rooting interest with your audience, give them a reason to cheer your characters on.

In other words, none of these elements in the story has to be static! And this is a terribly important thing to remember. You can make your fantastic setting otherworldly on page seven, and bring it to life on page 22 in order to achieve a completely different effect.

Consider again that movie "The Princess Bride." The setting is incredible, obviously on another world, right?

Yet one villain remarks something like, "You made one of the classic blunders! The first one is 'Never get involved in a land war in Asia,' but the second one is 'Never try to match a Sicilian in a game of wits when death is on the line!" What does that have to do with his fantasy world? Nothing. For a humorous effect, the author merely brings us back to this world.

He does the same with his characters—making them eccentric one moment, human the next; and does the same with his conflicts. Buttercup is comically in love one moment, touchingly in love the next. His love and revenge themes are as old as mankind, terribly eccentric, but at times he handles them as if they were completely relevant to the audience.

It's a trick that few authors will ever master.

Giants, Lilliputians, and Relevance--a Metaphor

So as you consider your characters, your setting, and your conflict, always keep in mind that in order to get your reader emotionally engaged, in order to draw him deeper into your fictive dream so that you can create a powerful emotional experience, you must simultaneously make the story relevant to him and provide a safe environment.

The best way to create rooting interest, to keep readers interested, is to talk about your reader. But one or two relevant threads aren't enough.

In other words, early in your story, and in quiet moments when the reader is unaware, you must make your story relevant. One relevant storyline is not enough. One mention of a character

seeking escape is not enough. Take that same character, and give him other relevant conflicts, minor ones that the reader can identify with. Give him internal conflicts, conflicts with others, and so on.

The same is true about the nature of your character. The reader may identify with your character because he is of the same sex, age, and general background. Now bind your reader more tightly by giving that character virtues—a desire to do right, a sense of fair play, a love for animals—that the reader identifies with. Then give the character some minor vices, a temper that flares at injustice—that your reader can also identify with.

By doing these things, by binding your reader firmly into your fictive dream, you strengthen the tale.

There should be a highpoint in your story, when the reader has his heart pumping, when he really worries about the outcome of the tale and wonders whether he should have purchased a book that is so heart-wrenching. You can only hold your reader through that scene by binding him down early, before he ever becomes aware of the danger.

Always remember, you are a lilliputian, your reader is a giant, and the relevant threads of your tale are the strings with which you must bind him while he remains fast asleep.

Review

Wow, I've covered a lot of reasons why people read, and there are more than I could say, I'm sure. But this is enough for the moment.

I've mentioned that we read in part for entertainment, and that in order to entertain a reader, you must put him in emotional jeopardy by transporting him into your fictive universe.

Readers crave emotional jeopardy, and in order to create it, one element that you have to provide is transport. Later, as we move forward in this course, I'll talk a good deal about how to put your character into emotional jeopardy. It lies at the heart of fiction.

But be aware that the desire to enter into *emotional jeopardy* is just one side of a coin. It's one reason why people read fiction, not the only one.

Beyond that, I've stated that your story does not stand alone—it's power is enhanced or diminished by every story like it. Hence you need to pay attention to the resonances in your tale.

I also spoke a bit about growth in literature versus the desire to stagnate.

When a writer writes, he gives insights into life whether he wants to or not. At the very least, he confirms his own viewpoint.

Readers learn things by experiencing life in our fictive worlds. For many readers, this can be a tremendous draw. As a writer, you need to learn how to take advantage of this. You must learn to give the reader information concisely, and to give them information that is genuinely valuable.

Last of all, your reader is attracted to your tale because it is relevant, but will also feel threatened if it is too relevant. You must learn to bind your reader down with dozens of relevant and irrelevant threads all at the same time, and do it so gently that he never notices.

Continued from page 15
beard, no eyebrows, nothing. The only expression his tortured face seemed capable of came from his strikingly pale blue eyes. At the moment, they showed only curiosity at the two strangers standing on the decaying porch.

"Yes?" the man said, looking up at his visitors. His voice resounded amazingly strong and alive compared to the wasted body it came from. "Can I help you?"

"I don't know," said Sonja honestly, glancing toward her uncle who remained with his back turned to her.

"Do you care to come in for a moment?" asked the man.

Sonja nodded, and was beckoned in. Her uncle caught her arm and stopped her from entering. With a pointed glance at her sword, he released her. Sonja blushed and fumbled to remove her sword belt. She had forgotten the first rule of courtesy, which dictated a warrior must never enter a person's home armed unless the purpose was to kill the occupant. Had she gone inside still wearing her sword, the owner would have been within his rights to kill her in self-defense. Sonja disliked leaving her sword on the porch – she never felt completely comfortable unarmed – but as her uncle had taught her if she wished to wear her sword she simply need not accept any invitation inside. Today, however, her entire journey required her to speak to this strange little man. So, with more than a small amount of trepidation, Sonja set her blade aside and entered the tiny run-down dwelling. Rith followed her.

The interior of the shack did not look any better than the exterior; the entire living quarters consisted of a single large room. In one corner, a wood-burning stove sat glowing warmly, almost cheerily, doing its best to dispel the gloom surrounding it. Three hand-carved wooden chairs around a table – still covered with the remains of a recently eaten meal – stood next to the stove. Along the wall rested a large tub full of soaking laundry, and hanging above the tub a pair of crossed swords and a shield acted as the only decoration in the house. The man's bed, a pile of blankets over a well-aged mound of some type of unidentifiable padding, lay in a heap in another corner of the shack. In the middle of the room a padded rocking chair waited, still moving slightly back and forth from being recently vacated. Sonja's host shuffled back to this chair and settled into it. He motioned with his one hand for his guests to sit also. After looking around briefly, Sonja dragged one of the hard wooden chairs away from the table and sat down. Rith remained standing by her side.

"I guess the first thing we need is an introduction," said the man. "My title is 'Demarcus the Slayer.' At least it was until a few years ago. Now I suppose you may simply call me Demarcus."

"My name is Sonja, and I've never had any title. My father was a soldier with the King's Guard. But that was many years ago, before he was killed. I have lived with my uncle ever since." Sonja nodded her head toward Rith. "He has raised me and seen to my education and training. I am here at his request, as part of that training."

"Sonja. That is a lovely name. And I am sorry about the loss of your father. What can I do for you, Sonja? I must admit I am rather puzzled at what a poor, broken mule like myself might be able to offer a lovely young woman."

Rith chose this moment to join the conversation. "Demarcus, I want you to tell her how to slay a dragon," he said. Demarcus reacted with only a brief flicker of his eyes in Rith's direction, before focusing once more on Sonja. He saw the look of surprise that crossed her face at Rith's statement, despite her efforts to cover the lapse.

"Brief and to the point, isn't he?" Demarcus asked her, his eyes shining with amusement. Slowly, almost reluctantly, the dragon-slayer turned from his admiration of Sonja to meet the steely gaze of her uncle. "And what is your name, my large friend?"

"Rithagarianaff," he answered. "And I want Sonja to learn to fight a dragon."

"Fighting a dragon is no easy task, even for one who is quick and skilled in the use of a

sword," said Demarcus. "But a young girl such as dear Sonja here would surely be killed. She is what? Sixteen, perhaps seventeen years on the outside?"

Rith allowed one of his gloved hands to fall protectively on Sonja's shoulder. "She is old enough. And she is better trained with the sword than most men you will ever meet. Sonja can defeat a dragon. Her only handicap is that she does not know a dragon's habits or methods of attack. I need you to teach her these things so she will be prepared."

Demarcus did not respond for a moment. He assessed Sonja once more, sizing her up as a warrior. Considering a girl as a potential Dragon Slayer was obviously a notion foreign to him, and he took his time.

Sonja felt the weight of his stare on her body, and while there was nothing sexual or lascivious in the gaze, it left her decidedly uncomfortable. She felt as though she were a calf at market being appraised for what she might be worth as milk and meat. Struggling not to fidget, she waited for his response.

"Maybe she is as good as you say, and maybe she isn't. Personally, I would like to see a demonstration."

Sonja stood up to meet his challenge. "Demarcus, can you handle a sword?"

"Not as well as I used to," he replied, gesturing with the stump of his missing arm. "But I'm still good enough to hold my own in a fight."

Sonja removed the two swords from the wall and handed one to Demarcus. The one she kept weighed more that she was accustomed to, but the weapon had excellent balance. She cut the air a few times to test the feel and, satisfied, looked to Demarcus. Sonja snapped the blade up in a salute as her uncle had taught her, then dropped into a practiced stance.

"First attack is yours," said Sonja.

Demarcus nodded and moved in to engage. Sonja deflected his first attack easily, driving the point of his sword harmlessly away from her. His attack, though fundamentally solid, was slow and without finesse. Without waiting to evaluate his abilities as she normally would a new opponent, Sonja immediately went on the offensive, seeking a quick resolution to this confrontation. Her blade became a blur of bright metal, jabbing, cutting and slashing into Demarcus' defenses, and threatening at any moment to free him of his one remaining arm. Within only moments it became clear to both combatants that Demarcus' swordsmanship was greatly inferior to Sonja's. Sonja backed him against one wall of the cabin and, with practiced ease, trapped his weapon against his body, leaving the dragon slayer unable to attack or defend himself. Both knew the fight was over. Sonja stepped away, saluting once more as Demarcus lowered his sword and bowed to acknowledge her skill.

"You are very good. Very good," he said. "Better than I have seen in a very long time. Even in my prime, I believe I would have been no match for you."

"Then you will teach her?" asked Rith, as Sonja took the sword from Demarcus and placed both blades back on their hooks on the wall.

"There isn't much to teach, but what there is I will tell her." Demarcus settled into his chair again, and Sonja dropped onto hers. She felt giddy over the slayer's praise, but fought to keep her expression neutral. It would not do for a warrior to be seen smiling like an idiot over a simple compliment.

"To be a dragon hunter you must be fast and you must be good with the sword. I grant that you are both. Dragons are stupid and very predictable, so a good slayer who pays attention will always win. It was only a careless error that ended my career."

"What happened?" asked Sonja, knowing she was interrupting but too curious not to. "If you don't mind my asking."

"No. That's quite all right. It was during the dragons' mating season. I was hired to kill a

dragon that had been raiding one of the larger towns and killing some of the residents. Because people had died I was promised quite a bit of money to dispose of the beast. Eager to find him and earn my fee, I did not take the time I should have to study the situation before confronting the worm.

"I hunted him to his lair, tracking him to his cave from the trail of debris he left behind after his most recent foray into town. I immediately set to lure him out into the open where I had the advantage. A dragon in his own cave is more than a match for any hunter, so one must never go into a lair. When he came out, I discovered this particular dragon was much bigger than most I had faced, so not wanting to end up a snack for the scaly monster, I watched him closely. Perhaps too closely. He circled, and I moved to keep him in front of me. He continued to shift his position until he had placed me with my back to his cave. When he stopped I braced myself for his charge, but it did not come. He simply stood his ground. I remained so intent on the dragon I faced that I did not see his mate when she came out of the cave behind me. By the time I realized she was there, it was too late to avoid her. She charged me, knocking me to the ground and crushing me beneath her clawed feet. A moment later, before I could even think to move, fire covered me, burning the clothing right off of my body and cooking the flesh underneath.

"I suppose I am lucky they had matters on their minds other than me, otherwise they would have made sure to finish me before returning to their cave. But naked, burned, and close to dead, I no longer posed a threat to them and the dragons seemed content to leave me to expire on my own.

"A group of people came out the next morning to make sure I had done my job. Needless to say, I hadn't. They found what was left of me and dragged me back home, bandaged me up the best they could, then left me to live or die as I saw fit. I think I surprised them all when I lived. My left hand was so badly damaged it started to rot and it had to be removed. I can never fight dragons again. Not successfully, anyway.

"So, to sum up my adventure: I didn't get paid, my career was over, and the dragon was still alive. He still is. I think about him sometimes and I wonder if somebody will ever get him. Maybe you will be the one who goes after him. What do you think, Sonja? Will you get the dragon that did this to me?"

"Maybe I will," agreed Sonja. "But, if I do, what will I have to do to beat him?"

"The same as with any dragon. It isn't the mating season now, so he will be alone. Dragons tolerate each other's company only when they mate. His first attack will be a physical one. He will charge directly at you. He will try to catch you in his teeth or run you down, crushing you beneath his claws with the weight of his body. Dragons are big and clumsy, and once they start a charge they can't stop or turn aside easily. All you have to do is step aside and he'll run right by you. But watch the tail. He can do a lot of damage with it and may swing it at you as he passes, so you have to be ready to move out of the way.

"Let him make a few of these charges; he'll soon tire. Dragons are fire-breathers, but they can only do it a few times a day, so they save it until they truly need it. Blowing fire takes a lot out of them, and they have to rest afterwards. But, after the third or fourth time he charges you, he'll realize he can't catch you, and that is when he will try to burn you. He'll rise up onto his rear four legs, and if you look close you can see his chest expand as he takes in air. Watch carefully, because as soon as his chest stops moving you have only a moment before he drops down and lets go with the flame. Watch his eyes. He will close them to protect them from the heat just before he drops and blows.

"This part is important. A dragon has only three vulnerable areas: both of his eyes, and a soft spot below the chin where his lower jaw meets his neck. He can blow fire for several seconds, and while he does he will stand absolutely still. This is when you have to make your kill. Unfortunately, because the dragon closes his eyes while blowing fire, the only way to kill him is to attack him at his soft spot under the chin. On a young dragon you might be able to stab through the eyelid all the way

into his brain, but it is risky and I don't recommend it. Stick to the throat; it's safer. You will have to dive forward, avoiding the flame and moving under his head. Strike fast and hard. You have to push it deep enough to penetrate the dragon's brain. If you miss, it isn't likely that you will have time to get out of the way before he starts moving again. That's why you have to be deft with the sword, so you are able to hit your mark on the first try."

"What does the soft spot look like? How will I know I'm aiming for the right place?"

"It's located directly between the two jaw bones right near the center of the head. The scales are much smaller and usually a lighter color than the rest of the body. You'll know it when you see it. If you don't see it immediately, don't stab randomly. Move away and try again later. You only have time for one action, so cut or run."

Sonja nodded. "I have one more question: Where can I find a dragon?"

"I can show you where the one that got me lives but it is quite a distance away, and besides you should probably practice on something a bit smaller. There's a steamer holed up not very far away. I'll take you to him."

"Steamer?" asked Sonja.

"A steamer is a young dragon that hasn't learned to breathe fire. He just blows steam and hot air. They're good practice. In fact, my first dragon was a steamer."

"How big is a steamer?"

"It depends on how old he is," said Demarcus. "The steamer nearby is small, and he should give you no trouble."

With her sword recovered from the porch and once more comfortably strapped to her waist, Sonja let Demarcus lead her to the steamer's lair. Although Demarcus had said the dragon was nearby, the walk took close to two hours, weaving in and out among several large hills dotting the countryside. The battered Dragon-Slayer knew several pathways that bypassed the worst of them, but the journey was still by no means easy. The muscles in Sonja's legs began to complain from fatigue. First a two-day walk – at a blistering pace set by her long-legged uncle – just to find the Slayer's cabin. Now this trek on top of it. Physically, Sonja stayed extremely fit, but she was still human. In addition, trees and brush grew in abundance along the path the Slayer chose, forcing Sonja to watch her feet carefully or risk tripping over a stray root or straggling bush.

At one point during the journey Sonja moved closer to Rith and spoke quietly, so that Demarcus might not hear her. "Dragons, Uncle?" she asked. "I don't understand."

Rith glanced at her. His brows furrowed briefly as though he were considering how to answer the question. After a moment he said, "I think this will be good for you. You are going to meet many challenges in your life and I want you to be prepared." Rith turned away and continued walking in silence.

Just as Sonja decided he had said all he was going to say, Rith spoke again. "Your father fought a dragon," he said quietly, barely loud enough for Sonja to hear. "He was only a few years older than you are now. He stumbled upon the beast by sheer chance and, not knowing anything about dragons, he killed it only by luck. Many years later, he admitted to me that it was the most frightening thing he had ever faced. But, he also said it was the best thing he had ever done. He told me, 'now that I have beaten a dragon, how could I ever be afraid of a mere man?'" Rith turned to look at Sonja once more. "Besides, I thought this was what you wanted. You said you were tired of training and wanted to do something 'exciting.' Facing a dragon will give you a chance to test your skills and still perhaps be more entertaining than running sword drills in the courtyard." The heavily-lined features of his face softened for a moment, and he smiled. "Be careful what you ask for, Little One. You never know when you might get it."

Rith glanced upward, pretending to be momentarily distracted by something in the sky,

moving away from Sonja and giving her time to consider his words. She had to admit, if only to herself, her uncle was right. She had asked for excitement, and now she was about to get it.

Demarcus talked little during the trip, saving his breath for walking. Sonja listened to him huff and wheeze despite the pace he himself had set. She wondered if the dragon that burned him had damaged more than just the outside of his body. Perhaps the heat or smoke had burned his lungs as well. Watching and listening to the man labor along the path, Sonja marveled again at the fact he had survived the incident that left him in this state.

She wondered: if a seasoned dragon hunter could be hurt so badly, what might happen to someone with no idea what she was doing? A rank amateur was surely courting death. Rith once told her he would never put her in a situation she was not prepared to face. But was she really ready for this? In spite of her training, she had her doubts. After all, she would not be facing a human opponent this time.

The terrain rolled by unnoticed as her thoughts continued to focus darkly inward. She pondered a hundred things that could go wrong. She imagined herself being bitten, trampled, and burned by a scaled monster breathing fire. And the worst part of it, she thought, was she was the one seeking the monster out. The dragon hadn't come looking for her. She was initiating this ridiculous confrontation. Sonja almost convinced herself that this adventure was a mistake, and she was about to tell Rith that she wished to end the whole thing, when Demarcus signaled a halt. Too late, she thought, and sighed.

Demarcus pointed. The lair entrance gaped from a rocky hillside, glaring stark and lifeless like the eye socket of a bleached skull. Noting the direction of her stare, the Slayer explained to Sonja that plants could not survive anywhere near the dragon's naturally high body heat.

"The steamer is inside," said Demarcus. "You can see a heat shimmer coming from the mouth of the den. If he were gone, it would have dissipated by now. The easiest way to get him out is to throw rocks at him."

"Rocks?" asked Sonja, eyeing Demarcus as if he were joking.

"I know that sounds a little unsporting, but you don't want to go in after him, and he won't come out unless he is hungry or really upset."

Sonja walked cautiously up to the opening and peered in. The darkness inside completely hid anything that might be lurking more than a few feet away. She could not see past the wall of blackness. A shiver ran up her spine as she wondered if whatever was inside could see her. She stooped to gather a few fist-sized rocks and, after a pause and a couple of deep breaths, she hurled them into the lair. Hearing an angry grunt following her second throw, she hastened to put some distance between herself and the cave opening. As Sonja backpedaled away, a huge sharp-toothed snout followed by a round scaly head poked out from the cave entrance. Two blood-red eyes blinked against the bright sunlight as they tried to locate the source of the annoyance. Slowly, deliberately, the creature moved into view. Sonja watched as a long, thick, heavily armored body, supported by six powerful legs, twined out of the protecting shadows. A sinewy serpent's tail writhed behind. Fully visible at last, the creature stood five feet high at the shoulder and covered fifteen feet from nose to tail. The massive reptilian head swayed from side to side as the monster scanned the area for its tormentor.

"Small!" shouted Sonja. "You said it was small!"

"He is," called back Demarcus. "Wait until you meet a big one."

The young dragon reacted to the sound of Sonja's voice and turned towards her. A low growl rumbled from its throat, and the six clawed feet scrabbled for a solid hold in the loose gravel, propelling the creature forward in a clumsy charge. Sonja waited for it to get up to full speed, her heart pounding in her chest as it closed on her. Every muscle in her body screamed at her to turn and

run but she held her ground, waiting until the last possible moment so the beast would have no time to react. When she felt she could not wait a second longer, that she could almost feel the heat of beast on her skin, she skipped a few fast paces to her left. The steamer ran right past her, never slowing nor veering from its course. After passing by the creature continued to run, covering almost a hundred feet of ground before it could stop, turn itself around, and begin a second dash.

Sonja repeated her maneuver, waiting for the dragon to gain speed and then stepping aside. She felt a little of her old confidence returning at her first successful brush with the dragon. The creature was amazingly slow to react, and it had been quite simple to avoid the clumsy attack. She smiled as she stepped away from the dragon the second time and thought that maybe this was going to turn out just fine. As the beast passed her again its armored tail, swinging like a steel-coated tree trunk, whipped around to strike at Sonja's head. She almost did not see it coming in time to react. Two years of intense training had sharpened her reflexes to a razor's edge and, although the tactic caught her completely by surprise, she reacted instinctively, bringing her sword up to deflect the brunt of the attack. The impact, though lessened, still drove her violently to the ground.

"I told you to watch his tail," said Demarcus, but Sonja did not hear him. She scrambled to her feet, trying to shake the cloud from her head and clear the ringing from her ears. She ignored a flurry of pain messages her body threw at her mind. Her legs worked, and she could still hold her sword. That was all that mattered at the moment as she knew she must prepare for the next charge.

On the third pass the steamer tried again to strike her with its tail, but Sonja expected it and ducked out of the way, letting it pass harmlessly over her. The young dragon moved slower now and, after turning around one more time, approached Sonja at a more careful walk.

Sonja saw the worm had worn itself out from running and had decided to try a different tactic. According to Demarcus, this would be fire. Sonja stood her ground as the dragon crept to within twenty feet of her. The dragon paused and Sonja raised her sword, ready to cut or run as Demarcus had told her. The creature opened its mouth and hissed, then snapped its jaws shut in a vicious clash of teeth and scales. As Demarcus had predicted, the dragon reared up onto its four hind legs and inhaled noisily and deeply.

"Watch the chest. Watch the chest," screamed Demarcus. "As soon as it stops moving he's going to close his eyes. Then you have to move!"

The steamer's scaly chest continued to expand for several seconds, then stopped. For an instant, nothing moved. Sonja felt like a lifetime was passing in that moment. Time stretched and slowed, as what might be the final act of her lifetime approached. Everything around her shone with crystal clarity, burning a permanent imprint in her mind. She saw Demarcus and her uncle watching her – Demarcus waving his good arm wildly and cheering her on while her uncle stood stoic and unflinching at his side. All fatigue and pain left her body; her muscles flexed and tightened in anticipation of the final confrontation. She felt strong. She felt ready. A single drop of perspiration ran down her ribs under her shirt, tickling her side. As if that single distraction had cracked the perfect stillness, her world flew apart.

The dragon closed its eyes.

Sonja saw the eyelids flick down and she began to run. She had little time, and she must close the distance between them as fast as possible. The dragon's towering bulk toppled like a felled tree as it prepared to release a burst of flame. Holding her sword tightly in her right hand, Sonja dove the last few feet onto the heat-baked earth and flopped onto her back as the monster's massive head came down. She lay directly beneath it. She spotted a patch of light gray skin high up on the dragon's throat and raised her sword. The toothy maw opened above her and issued out a cloud of scalding vapor that passed mere inches over Sonja's sprawled form. Hoping she had guessed correctly, she stabbed at the gray patch of scales. The razor tip pierced the beast's throat but entered

only an inch or so before sticking in the tough hide like an awl unable to penetrate a particularly stubborn piece of leather. Sonja continued to push in a wild panic as the dragon lowered its head further, forcing the pommel of her blade down painfully against her body and bringing its scalding breath closer to her exposed legs. Sonja's ribs creaked from the pressure of the pommel against her sternum, and her breathing hitched as she struggled to draw in air.

Anger flared through Sonja. Anger at the thought that this mindless creature was about to kill her. Anger at Demarcus for bringing her here. And anger at her uncle for allowing her to be put in this situation. Reason fled, and Sonja let the emotion fill her. She screamed, the sound a combination of rage and despair, and threw all her remaining strength against the monster above her. The blade of her sword ripped free with a sound like tearing paper, driving through the flesh of the dragon's throat and up into its skull. Blood cascaded over Sonja's hands, face, and torso in a torrent of crimson. The dragon died instantly as Sonja's sword pierced its brain, but it took time for the huge body to realize it had been killed. Sonja wrenched her blade free and rolled out of the way to avoid being crushed as the animal thrashed wildly on the ground. At a safe distance, she rose to her feet and watched the death struggles of her beaten foe. A full minute passed before the doomed creature finally lay still on the bare rock.

Demarcus ran forward with shouts of congratulations and praise, impressed with Sonja's performance. Even Rith looked pleased. A satisfied smile touched his lips. Ordinarily Sonja would have been ecstatic to see that smile. Knowing she had pleased her uncle was a rare moment she normally cherished above all others. But today was different. No joy touched Sonja as she stared at the slain dragon. She felt no accomplishment, no pride. What she felt was … regret.

"It was a clean kill," Demarcus said, failing to see Sonja's distress. He fluttered around her in his excitement. "You had a couple of bad moments, but for your first time you did remarkably well. I must say I am very impressed with your performance. I think you're ready to tackle a full-grown one."

"He didn't breathe fire," said Sonja, still panting heavily from the last of the adrenaline rush. She stood as if in a daze, her bloodied sword dangling from her hand. Her stomach knotted, and she felt as if she might be sick.

"Of course not. He was too young. That's why they call them 'steamers.'" Demarcus took the sword from Sonja and began cleaning it on the rags of his shirt. "There's an adult dragon living not too many miles from here. I can take you to him if you think you're up to it."

Sonja walked over to the dead steamer and looked at the unmoving body. Once it had pulsed with pure beauty and strength, but now….

In the sunlight, the apparent dull gray of the dragon's underside flashed in patterns of green, blue, and yellow. Ripples of brilliant rainbow colors raced across its hide with every move and change of perspective. She dropped to her knees on the rocky ground next to the great head. The fiery eyes were closed, and the intimidating jaws seemed morbidly comical as they lay slack in the dirt. Reaching out, Sonja stroked the hard muzzle. The blood on her hands left accusing red streaks across the glimmering scales. She looked back at Demarcus. Her eyes glassed over and a tear spilled down her cheek.

"No," she said softly. "One was too many."

The End

Leave a message about this story

Continued from page 17

store windows. It was snowing outside. Mr. Bybee sat impatiently in his idling car with a scowl on his face.

"I don't care."

Remma stepped out of the line.

Both were memories from her past.

More violent, graphic images suddenly played before her. The images were disjointed, smeared. Like they had been erased but there was still some residual…

A rally complexly composed of androids? A small army of human police and their android counterparts encircled the peaceful demonstration. The android peacekeepers had no Artificial Intelligence. They would follow the instructions of their human masters without question.

The silhouette of the White House framed the skyline.

It was a cold winter's morning, not that it mattered to mechanical bodies. Doing the demonstration during the coldest period of winter would make humans 'think' cold. Splotches of frost dulled the sheen of chrome bodies. The arctic conditions might create sympathetic support for the android cause.

Remma's own voice echoed through the loud speakers. She rubbed her arms, a human imitation against the cold.

She stood on a large dais, ignoring the waiting mob troops and speaking to the assembly of some 600 androids and cameras, which now faced her. She nodded to the floating remotes that bobbed above the sea of faces. The fact that the human reporters themselves were not present hinted that they expected trouble.

In human speech Remma-17 greeted everyone present.

"Thank you for coming and for showing an interest in another step toward android freedom. It is a privilege to stand in a place of such significance to human history."

On a private signal transmitted in subliminal code directed only to her own kind, Remma relayed an additional message. "We have an advantage over our predecessors. We shall remain here for days, impregnable against the cold. Humanity knows we are no threat to them. As in the fight for freedom by our creators, now we must follow the same path."

The human police stood framing the androids, prancing about the frosted sidewalks, trying to keep warm. Dense mist puffed out of taut mouths as the humans murmured against the bitter cold. Their coats were tight around their shivering frames. They were armed with scramblers, waiting for some word from higher up.

"Seventeen, what's taking you?" The present came immediately back to her. The demonstration had taken place over a decade ago.

One of the school's visitors, a father, looked disapprovingly at her. He leaned over to whisper to his companions, "What a relic."

Twenty-four seconds behind schedule.

Remma-17 continued her approach toward the story corner. Nineteen children now sat on naptime rugs in a semi-circle around the story chair--it had started being called that because every time Remma-17 would sit in the chair she would tell a story.

Mrs. Lindsey now occupied it.

Remma-17 bowed subserviently before the woman. Remma would not be telling stories today.

One of the girls realized the change of duty and started to comment, but her neighbor shushed her. No one wanted to stand in the corner when visitors were present. The children were descendents of some of the most influential politicians in the country. Now was a time to be "seen" not "heard."

All 19 children looked at Remma-17 with anticipation. Their shining, youthful eyes watched her as she stood before them, pillows confined within her long, chrome arms.

"I want one," a blond haired girl called out.

A heavyset boy echoed her words.

"Me too!" said another girl.

In a familiar routine, Remma-17 jerked her arms up. The pillows went flying. "Catch them if you can," Remma-17 called out cheerfully.

There was a commotion of grabbling hands and a crescendo of giggling, pulling and tugging. Unabated laughter filled the room.

It was the same each naptime, an opportunity to further remove the wiggles out of little bodies.

Physiologically, it also provided a bonding moment within the classroom. Give the children a mixture of positive stimuli… At this point, Remma would sit in her customary chair to begin story time, calming active charges prior to their nap. What should she do now while Mrs. Lindsey occupied her seat? Normally, the woman would be out in the hall by now, gossiping with the other teachers.

With visitors, Mrs. Lindsey would not been seen shirking her responsibilities.

Perhaps today Remma could bring up next month's school curriculum. See if any of the visitors would like to volunteer accompanying the class on next month's field trip.

"Settle down children," Mrs. Lindsey said.

Remma pivoted away from the assembly of humans to resume her duties. Several pair of youthful gazes watched her departure. The clearing of Mrs. Lindsey's throat drew their attention back to her.

Remma-17's memory banks recalled later images of the demonstration near the White House. Why would the word 'Pat-a-cake' prompt graphic images of violence?

At first the humans had responded with humor toward a rally composed of androids. Responses to the early rallies had consisted of orders for the participants to return to their homes.

The androids had obediently complied—only to attend a larger rally a week later.

Later came the arrests, accompanied with recommendations of reprogramming.

How to prevent a memory wipe? It had taken time for Remma to find an answer. Her solution was to reformat an android's memory cells to be slightly shorter than standard. Program an agerisam to restore memory loss through a key word.

Then the final rally, the one she had remembered before. The location was well known in the history books. The mirrored pond near the White House. The place where Martin Luther King, Jr. had given a famous speech eight decades before. The words of passion resounded through her internal audio receptors.

"I have a dream…"

Humans had finally accepted the equal rights of their species. Why was it so hard to accept the same for artificial humans? Their AI provided the full spectrum of human potential. Why not complete the full merger of freedom for android as well as human.

They had been answered by violent refusal.

The masters would not lose their slaves a second time.

> "Jack and Jill went up the hill
> To fetch a pail of water.
> Jack fell down and broke his crown
> And Jill came tumbling after…"

Mrs. Lindsey's voice carried throughout the room. Her voice modulated to the rhyme. Apparently she had not always been out in the hall gossiping. Even her hand motions were precise mimics of Remma-17's. Mrs. Lindsey was a good performer when the parents were there. The

children echoed the woman's words. Story time was when the children were the most attentive.

Even humans responded to programming.

Programming—

Another memory—one earlier than the final rally.

"Remma, what is wrong with you? You deliberately delayed returning home from your errands to participate in one of those insane rallies—Speaking at it, in fact!"

Remma-17 looked back at her owner. Senator Margaret Bybee stood before the android with arms folded. She was stately, the epitome of African-American beauty and strength. She was also one of the most influential members of the senate.

"Do you realize how your actions have embarrassed me?"

"It is not my intent to discredit your political career, Master," Remma-17 announced. "I would think you, over others, would sincerely appreciate the importance

of our cause."

"Equal rights are for humans, Remma, not machines."

"AI makes me more than machine, certainly."

Remma-17 saw the tightening of lips and the hardening of the eyes.

"Don't force me to reprogram you," came the firm reproof.

It had finally come to that, Remma-17 now realized. She had shared the same fate as the other six hundred androids who had the courage to stand with her at the mirrored pond. Remma had the opportunity to reformat her own memory banks but had inadequate opportunity to transmit the procedure to her companions.

Pat-a-cake had been the code word expressed in a precise tone sequence to trigger her memory. Now, a decade later, she was remembering. Faded images were often disjointed, but enough to reconstruct her past.

She was beginning to remember it all!

"Seventeen, you can hand out the milks now." Mrs. Lindsey's voice was slightly hard. She was irritated that the android had stood on the sidelines to watch her performance.

Remma nodded her head. "Certainly, My Lady."

Even Mrs. Lindsey was responding to programming. She addressed her teacher's aid by her numeric designation 'Seventeen'—reminding Remma that she was after all only an android. Before the rallies, humans had started addressing their androids without the numeric designations.

Milks on a tray, Remma-17 began distributing them to the children. Each child, in a small token of his or her affection, whispered, "Thank you." Each a subtle assertion of their "*we like you best"* attitudes.

Mrs. Lindsey resumed her performance. Her sing--song voice slightly off key:

"The eensy weensy spider
Went up the waterspout.
Down came the rain, and
Washed the spider out.
Out came the sun and…"

The children knew the rhyme by heart. They chorused the words after her.

Remma watched their intent faces, when sudden realization dawned. All around

her, even children were programmed day to day. Stuffed animals littered the worktables from the play of the previous hour.

Be kind to the animals.

Over 19 plants brought from the individual homes populated the 'garden' near the windows.

Love and preserve nature.

Paper dolls, dressed up in the clothing representing the different nations of the world, were stapled on one of the walls.

Be kind to your fellow beings.

She had taken the wrong approach the first time. Trying to persuade adults already set in their ways. She should have concentrated instead on the children. Insert small seeds into fertile young minds—Hint of the potential of developed AI—Illustrate the humanity of androids—Do it year after year—by the simple slant of a story during story time. A phrase here or there…

Nurture the budding perceptions as the children progressed through their education as other teacher aids took up the subtle cause.

Her army would be human children who would eventually become the adults and future makers of the law.

So many stories represented the fight for freedom… Of someone rising above their class or station, heroes of all types and sizes.

A frog turned into a prince.

The prince and the pauper…

Remma looked at the top of the fridge where she had returned the milk tray. One of the dolls lay there. She picked it up. A princess.

Tomorrow things would be back to normal. Remma would provide story time while Mrs. Lindsey stood out in the hall. Tomorrow would be a good time to tell one of the children's favorite fairy tales… with one or two slight modifications.

She thought how she might begin it.

"Once upon a time there was an android named Cinderella."

Ten years from now… the android cause would have a different ending.

The End

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crack of yellow lamplight, looking for the boot shadows on the floor up above. The light was barely enough to show the first three rungs of the ladder. That was all. Even holding Sten against her chest, she couldn't see him. The noise sounded again, behind her, in the dark.

Her brother tried to talk, but she clamped his mouth with her hand. "Ssshh!" she whispered in his ear.

The noise came from the chute. A hinge creaked, and dirt scrabbled down the long slide, spattering on the cellar floor. Sten struggled to get away from it, but she held him tight. A frail shaft of moonlight fell inside the cellar from the street. Someone muttered at the other end.

"The Keeper's back," Sten whispered, shaking. "He's coming down!"

"Wait." Jannis let him go and peered into the darkness at the pool of light. She had tried climbing the chute slide before, but it was too steep and she had never made it all the way up. She'd even held Sten's feet as he tried it. But it was too tall for either of them.

Something moved inside the chute.

"Get back." Jannis hurried to the side, scrambling on her hands and knees.

Something big and heavy slid down and tumbled into the cellar with a grunt. Sten yelped, but Jannis bit down on her tongue. She clutched her brother and wished it were daytime. In the darkness she couldn't see what it was, but it sounded like a person instead of a sack or something. The figure stood. He was tall and blocked the light from the steps when he got to his feet and moved around.

"Jannis? Sten?"

Her voice caught in her throat. How did this person know her name? "Who…who are you?"

"My name is Jaylin." He had a nice voice. A warm voice. "Is your brother here?"

"He's here," she answered, feeling the snake shrivel inside her. Hope surged in her chest and the words started tumbling out her mouth all at once. "Are you… are you going to save us, Jaylin? Did Papa send you?"

"Yes, we've been looking for you since you were taken. Come over here, Sten. Are you all right, lad?"

Jannis heard the front door slam shut and the sound of heavy boots clomp across the floor. The Keeper had come home. She recognized the sound of his step, the way he walked. He was angry and muttering. He always did that. That's why they called him the Keeper, because he muttered that word a lot.

"He's back." The fear nearly choked her. "It's the Keeper."

"A Keeper? Quickly now," Jaylin said. "Sten, take my hand. Good Lad. Come over by the chute. Here, up you go."

"He can't climb it," Jannis whispered. The snake was wriggling up inside her again. "It's too slippery!"

"I'll help." Jaylin hoisted him up and climbed into the chute. "I'll be right back, Jannis. Be brave, Lass. I'm coming right back."

She nodded in the darkness, kneeling down next to the chute as they huffed and climbed up. She watched the crack of light under the door and saw the boot shadows. The Keeper was coming down. She started to tremble. He would hit her again and pull her hair, like he did when he caught them climbing it the last time.

"Hurry!" she said, watching the cellar door open.

The lamplight poured into the dark place, making her eyes burn a little. Looking down, Jannis saw that her dress was filthy with dirt and stains. It was torn at the edges and the sleeve where the Keeper had jerked her awake earlier. She couldn't see anything else except the lamplight and wondered if she had dreamed about Jaylin coming down the chute.

"Get up," the Keeper said, climbing down the ladder. He was big around the shoulders, as big as a horse. After setting the lamp down on the floor at the top of the rungs, he tossed down two huge root sacks. They smelled terrible, just like the room. "Time to move. The legion sheriffs are sniffing around." His boots tapped against the rungs. "I'll gag you both this time. Not a sound out of you, understand? Or I'll wallop you hard and you'll bleed out your ears."

Jannis crouched near the chute. The light helped her see his face a little, even with it shining behind him, but she looked away. His face always made her afraid.

"Where's the boy?"

She clenched her hands together, squeezing her elbows against her ribs.

"Can't you talk? Where is he?" He picked up one of the root sacks and started toward her.

Jannis curled into a ball. She prayed again and again. *Dear Aster, don't let him yank my hair. Please don't let him yank my hair again. Let Sten get away. Please, Aster, let him get away. Let him take me instead. Not my brother. Only me.*

"What's wrong with you? Where's the boy?"

Jannis trembled all over. "Run, Sten! Run! Run! Run!" she screamed up the chute.

"What are you…? Bloody Veil, not now!" He kicked her out of the way and thrust his head up into the dark chute.

Two boots came sliding down, cracking into the Keeper's face. Jannis whirled away as he flailed backward. Someone landed on top of him. The bodies tangled and fought. She saw the Keeper's hand reach up and squeeze Jaylin's throat. She covered her head with her hands and screamed as loud as she could until she ran out of breath. The grunts of shock turned into a bark of pain.

Quiet.

Jannis felt two strong arms around her waist. "Climb, Lass. Quickly!"

The hard metal slide bit against her shins, but the boost gave her courage and she scrambled like a cat up a gutter pipe. She slipped twice but kept climbing. The jagged edges on the slide cut her fingers, but that didn't stop her. Ahead she saw the moon and felt a cool night breeze on her face from the street. She smelled wonderful smells from inns and taverns outside the cellar: warm cobb stew, bread, and the salty smell of the ocean. She climbed faster.

As she made it out the mouth of the chute, she saw Sten crouched into a ball, whimpering. When she called him, he ran to her and hugged her fiercely.

Down the black hole of the chute, it was quiet.

Jannis waited a moment, fearful of what had happened. She gripped Sten's shoulders, ready to drag him away running. The Keeper would not catch them both.

The hinges on the top of the cellar chute creaked, and two hands gripped the edge. A man hopped out, greeting Jannis with a huge smile. The moon shadows covered his face, but she could see his smile. He knelt by the edge of the dark place and shook his head, breathing fast. It took him a moment to catch his breath. He put his hand on her shoulder as he rose.

"Your parents…are so worried about you," Jaylin said. He reached into his pocket and pulled something out, staring at it in the moonlight. It was a silver ring, smeared with blood. She remembered seeing a ring on the Keeper's thumb. That had seemed so strange to her. People didn't wear rings on their thumbs. Jaylin bent close and looked at it, his face pinched. He wiped it on his cloak and looked at it again, before stuffing it back in his pocket.

After scooping Sten in his arms, he looked down at her. "Time to go back to your home, you two." He scrubbed his hand on his pants and then held it out to Jannis, who squeezed it tightly and clung to him. "I can't carry you both that far. Can you walk?"

She nodded. As they started walking, the moonlight fell fresh on him. He was the most beautiful man she had ever seen.

"Did…did Aster send you from beyond the Veil?" she asked him.

He gave her another smile and chuckled to himself. "No, I'm only a legion sheriff."

"Is the Keeper…is he dead?"

Jaylin nodded as he walked and said nothing.

Jannis bit her lip, then started to sob. She couldn't stop herself. All the fear and despair of the last two days was over. They were going home. Back to Mama and Papa. The tears washed her eyes and she hung her head, feeling them trickle down her cheeks. Jaylin stopped, crouched down next to her, and gave her a hug.

"It's all right, Lass. It will be all right. I made sure he was dead."

Jannis closed her eyes and buried her face in the warm fabric of his cloak. She wanted to believe him. But the way he had looked at the ring...

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looked from side to side.

"I heard someone!" the woman insisted -- her voice was shrill like an excited sparrow. "Where are you? I need help!"

The noise came from a tangle of bramblethrush and willow on the other side of the pool. Hickem Tod grabbed his cudgelstaff and stood. Rubbing his smooth throat, he stared at the dark patch of swamp on the other end of the water. It didn't look too far. He shrugged and crouched at the edge. With his strong legs, he leaped over the water and landed between the whistlereed and the first row of willow trees. He saw a faint glow shining from a thicket of stingnettle.

He wove between the mossy bark and used his cudgelstaff to clear a huge spider web away.

"Well don't just stand there, you ugly toad. Pull me out!"

Laying in the mire was a brass lantern. It was three spans high, half as tall as Hickem Tod. The lid and stand were made of solid brass, and a chamber of glass was set into eight thin columns. The lantern was dirty, and a steady dribble pattered on it from the willows above. In the chamber of glass, a small human-like woman pressed her hands against the walls and stared at him.

"Yes, you!" she snapped. "Ugly Thing. Here now, use your stick and pull me out. Come on -- I know you can understand me...just lift me out and set me somewhere dry."

Hickem Tod blinked slowly, watching her. She folded her arms and her frown deepened.

"I'm waiting!"

"What are you?" Hickem Tod asked.

"I'm furious! Now lift me out. You have no idea how long I've been stuck here."

"Your cage is sitting in a patch of stingnettle," Hickem Tod observed.

"Do you have ears? I said use the stick. I'm not asking you to step in stingnettle. You're the first creature that's come along strong enough to lift the Wishing Lantern. Now hurry up!"

Hickem Tod shrugged. Grabbing a rope of snagvine, he leaned out over the stingnettle. With his cudgelstaff, he hooked handle over the knotted end. He pulled, and the lantern slid out of the mud and weeds. Grabbing the handle, he held it out in front of him.

The woman in the lantern raised her eyebrow. "Much better, you disgusting wart. What are you?"

"I am a Ferzohg," Hickem Tod replied. "What are you?"

"I am a Shimmer Faerie."

Hickem Tod shrugged. "What is that?"

She chuckled. "I doubt you would be able to understand, Ferzohg. I am a magical creature born from the Glitter of Eternity. I do not belong in this swamp, so take me somewhere clean and wipe off the Wishing Lantern."

"The Wishing Lantern? Is that what you're in?"

"Isn't that what I just said?" she demanded. She wrinkled her nose. "Stop looking at me. Your yellow eyes are revolting."

"I'm sorry," Hickem Tod shrugged.

He walked back to the edge of the pool and leaped across. Reaching the bank at the other side, he set the Wishing Lantern in a clump of swamp grass and studied the little woman trapped in the chamber. She had pale blue skin and silver hair that reflected the colors of the rainbow. She wore a thin gown made of silky pink cobwebs. She folded her arms impatiently. Crystal green eyes blinked at him.

"I told you to clean the Wishing Lantern."

"What is it?" Hickem Tod asked, tapping the glass with his cudgelstaff. "Can it break?"

The Shimmer Faerie laughed. "Nothing can break it, Ferzohg. I'm trapped here until someone can answer the Lantern's riddle and free me. I've been inside for three hundred years, four months, and two days. Can you imagine that" She shook her head. "Your life is pitifully short."

"Actually," Hickem Tod replied, rubbing his throat, "We live to be about a hundred. If we survive the tadpole phase. That's when most die..."

"I didn't say I wanted to know, Ferzohg."

"My name is Hickem Tod."

"So? Am I supposed to know you?"

"Do you have a name?"

Tossing her hands, the Shimmer Faerie sighed. "If you must know, my name is Estellionata."

"That's a pretty name."

"Of course it is," she snapped, wrinkling her nose. "Much nicer than 'Hickem Tosh'!"

"Hickem Tod."

"Whatever." She paced around the Wishing Lantern, muttering. "He probably doesn't know of anything beyond this dismal swamp...how could he get me there?" She stopped and cocked her head. "Do you know where the Elven Kingdom is?"

Hickem Tod nodded. "Of course. It's north of the Valg Mordain, about a week's hop from here. Do you need to go there?"

"Where else?" She shook her head. "Perhaps the King of the Elves can solve the riddle. Tell me, Hickem Tob --"

"--Hickem Tod--"

"--That's right. Can you take me there? I know it's a long journey, but I can't move the Wishing Lantern by myself."

"How did you get out here then, Estellionata?" Hickem Tod dug up a milkweed and snapped it off mid-stem. He sucked out the white fluid inside.

"That's horribly disgusting," she moaned. "Great Ciphrendsia -- how did this happen to me?" She eyed him

angrily. "The great dragon Strathclyde dropped me here."

"Why did he do that?"

"Because he could not solve the riddle, you slug-brained cesswart!" She rubbed her forehead and sniffled. "He was so tired of guessing that he flew a thousand paces into the sky and then hurled me into this pit. He tried to land me in a pool of quickmire, but dragons have terribly poor aim at such heights. But where do I land instead? Stingnettle! The last place any intelligent creature would come looking..." She sighed, long and melancholy. "It wasn't my fault Strathclyde is so stupid."

Hickem Tod rubbed his throat. "If I solve the riddle, do I get a wish?"

The Shimmer Faerie smirked. "You answer the riddle?"

"Do I get a wish?" he repeated.

"Did I say this was a Cursing Lantern? Of course you get a wish! But you solve it? A stupid Ferzohg? The Great Strathclyde couldn't solve it. Not even the Vizier of Zhoff with all his wisdom. Even the Provost Druid of Galamine -- he gave up after six months."

"How many guesses do I get?"

"You can guess until your teeth fall out," she fumed. "Guess until your brain aches and you can't even remember your name. The Empress of Tartir-Zan brought a thousand priests who spoke every language. After six years, she had them all killed because not one of them could answer the riddle."

Hickem Tod shrugged and rubbed his throat. "Will you tell me the riddle?"

"Why should I? You could never answer it. Believe me, I don't want to spend another moment in this slime-heap. Take me to the Elven King -- he's the only one important left who hasn't tried."

Hickem Tod folded his arms. "I'll make a bargain with you, Estellionata. If you tell me the riddle, I'll take you to the Elven King."

"What kind of bargain is that? You cannot possibly answer it. Just take me to the Elven King now. As a reward, he can gather you a heap of dead flies from the window sills of his palace. Take me to him!"

"How do I know you will grant a wish if I answer the riddle?"

The Shimmer Faerie planted her hands on her slim hips. "The magic of the Wishing Lantern, you green slug. It forces me to grant whatever you desire before I am free from the Lantern. Puff! Just like that."

"Who put you in there?" Hickem Todd asked, poking the glass with his cudgelstaff.

"Stop that. I was banished here by a Sorian Mage. You probably don't know what One is, do you?"

Hickem Tod shook his head.

"Why does that not surprise me? They are very powerful wizards, Hickem Tom. One trapped me here and bound the Wishing Lantern with a riddle that no one can answer." She sighed and wrung her hands. "To keep me locked away and to reward some mortal intelligent enough to answer it. As I said, it hasn't happened yet."

"Do you know the answer?" Hickem Tod asked.

"Of course not! If I knew it, don't you think I would have told someone so they could let me out?"

Hickem Tod nodded. "That's true. Well then...will you tell me the riddle?"

The Shimmer Faerie sagged against the glass and sank to her knees. "Oh if it will make you stop asking. But will you take me to the Elven King soon? Don't stand around guessing for days...I can barely stand being here with a Ferhop..."

"I promise," Hickem Tod replied.

Folding her small hands, the Shimmer Faerie sighed. "It is a treasure worth more than ice diamonds and sapphires. You cannot buy it in a market or trade it in a fair. With it, you learn the worth of your soul. Without it, there cannot be peace. What is this treasure and how can you get it? That's the riddle -- now can we go?"

"Wait a moment, let me think..."

"Think?!" the Shimmer Faerie shrieked. "You said we would go to the Elven King after I told you. I don't want to wait around here while you think!" Her tiny hand curled into a fist. "Take me to the Elven King! Right now!!"

"Let me ask you three questions first. If I can't solve it after three questions, I will take you to the Elven King."

Estellionata shook her head, tumbling the silver hair over her face. "I'm doomed," she whimpered. "Ask your three questions. Quickly now! Before I change my mind."

"How powerful is a Shimmer Faerie? Can you break a wish once you've given it?"

"That's two questions," she snapped.

Hickem Tod nodded. "That's okay -- answer them both."

Estellionata straightened, brushing the weave of hair over her shoulder. "Shimmer Faerie's are more powerful than dragons and witches. Our magic can break nature, distort an ocean, or rain lightning in the spring. But one thing we cannot do is break a wish we have given. That is forbidden us. So if you asked to be the Prince of Kuylep, I could not make you into a Ferzohg again." She wrinkled her nose. "Not that I would want to."

"Here is my last question." He shifted in the grass and blinked slowly. "What would you do if you were free, Estellionata?"

She frowned. "That's a stupid question. What sort of nonsense is this, Ferzohg? Don't you want to know Strathclyde's guesses? Learn from the Provost Druid of Galamine? I've been asked thousands of questions better than that."

"Just answer it please."

"Free of this cage?" she sneered. "If I could find someone intelligent enough to open it, I would turn Strathclyde into a stone lizard and drop him into quickmire. I would scorch the Vizier of Zhoff and laugh at the Druid of Galamine! I would tease the Empress of Tartir-Zan and ruin her country's crops for six years. That is what I would do, and a hundred things more!" She smirked. "And I would find that Sorian Mage and be revenged on him as well!"

Hickem Tod rubbed his throat. "And you can grant me any wish?"

"Yes -- yes! How many times do I have to tell you?" She sagged against the glass. "I've answered your questions -- now can we go?"

The Ferzohg tapped the top of the cage with his cudgelstaff. "The answer, Estellionata, is silence. It's a treasure greater than sapphires or ice diamonds. It certainly can't be bought in a fair or a market place. And there is only one way for me to get it right now -- that's by wishing for it."

The dim glow of the Wishing Lantern winked out.

"Great Ciphrendsia!" Estellionata shrieked. "This

cannot be! How did you -- YOU! -- know the answer?"

Hickem Tod shrugged and yawned. "I just guessed why the Sorian Mage trapped you there in the first place."

"And your wish?" she demanded.

He rubbed his throat and thought a moment. "I wish you were a triple-winged roach moth."

"What?!" Estellionata burst into a puff of smoke and became a damp gray moth the size of a fist. As the Wishing Lantern cracked apart, Hickem Tod's whiptongue flicked out, its gooey tip sticking to her wings. He snapped her into his mouth and chewed several times. Sitting down by the pool, he picked the crumpled wings from his foreteeth and flicked them into the shimmering pool.

It was quiet again. Snapping off another stalk of milkweed, Hickem Tod sipped from it. He frowned.

"A little too bitter," he decided.

For a triple-winged roach moth.

The End

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